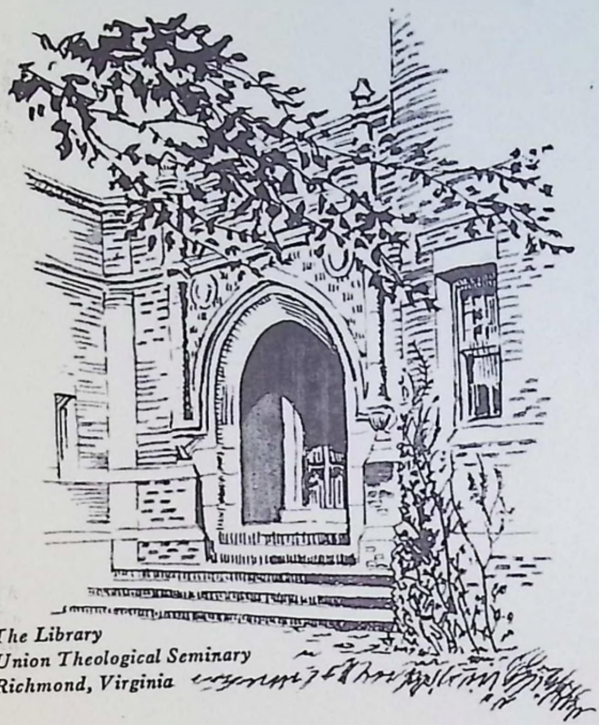

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Every thinking church member will find this frank and lively discussion of Christian faith and practice, from the Reformed position, a stimulating and thought-provoking reading adventure. The author includes a forthright examination of the role of the Christian and the Church in the modern world, making this a discussion that will engage many readers even beyond its particular sphere of reference, the Christian Reformed denomination.

This is a plea to the Christian Reformed Church to maintain its Reformed heritage. "Due to the fact that all Christians, Calvinists no less than others, are prone to error and sin, no Reformed Church can afford to be complacent. To take it for granted . . . that the Christian Reformed Church will continue sound for, let us say, another century, is to do it a vast disservice," states the author.

Subjects discussed include:

Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy
Traditions
The Covenant
Evangelism
Education
Common Grace and the Antithesis
Godliness
Preaching
The Kingship of Christ
Ecumenism
The Church and Its Influence

These essays are filled with insight born of the author's long and varied experience in posts of leadership. They are amply suited for group study and discussion. No Christian Reformed home should be without this challenging book.

To Be or Not to Be Reformed

Whither the Christian Reformed Church?

by

R. B. KUIPER

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JOHN CALVIN

The 450th Anniversary

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PREFACE

When, in 1926, I wrote *As To Being Reformed,* I had recently come out of the Reformed Church in America, a denomination which was compromising its Reformed testimony. The aforesaid book was in effect a plea, addressed to the Christian Reformed Church, that it continue Reformed.

Since that time I have witnessed at close range the surrender of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, a large denomination with Reformed standards, to old and new modernism. I have also witnessed the heroic struggle of the little Orthodox Presbyterian Church to adhere to the Reformed faith and Reformed practices. In fact, it has been my privilege — it was not always a pleasure — to participate in that struggle. More recently, now for more than six years, in one of which — 1957 — the Christian Reformed Church celebrated its centennial, I have been a sympathetic inside observer of the life of that church at what is usually considered its center. On that variegated background I am now addressing to the Christian Reformed Church another plea to maintain its Reformed heritage.

Do I think the Reformed character of the Christian Reformed Church is being threatened? To that question there can be but one answer. Due to the fact that all Christians, Calvinists no less than others, are prone to error and sin, no Reformed church can afford to be complacent. To take it for granted, as I fear some do, that the Christian Reformed Church will continue sound for, let us say, another century is to do it a vast disservice.

Am I of the opinion that the Christian Reformed Church is beset by specific perils at this time? Of that I am certain. I see such perils both within the church and without, and to them I would call attention. But I also see within the church much good which, I hope, may be augmented. And so this volume, while in no way a prediction, is meant to provide both warning and encouragement.

Let it be said at the very outset, the strength of the Christian Reformed church lies, not in separatism, but in its distinctiveness; and no greater peril besets it than the diminution of that

distinctiveness – what Abraham Kuyper denominated *"de verflauwing der grenzen";* that is to say, "the fading away of boundaries." And that is a way of saying that it must cling tooth and nail to its Reformed patrimony and must refuse steadfastly to sell even a portion of its Reformed birthright.

Let no one think that I am urging conservatism only. Progressiveness, too, is of the essence of Calvinism. In writing the following chapters I have had in mind, not only Christ's command to the church of Philadelphia: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11), but also the Scriptural injunction: "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18). There are those in its membership who think that the Christian Reformed Church can well afford to become somewhat less Reformed. The truth is that it will continue Reformed only if it keeps growing more Reformed. That challenge it must meet courageously.

In a book of this kind I feel there is room for an occasional autobiographical reference. May the reader agree.

Valuable suggestions by my wife were an aid to me in the preparation of the manuscript.

In presenting this plea I am motivated by a warm love for the church in which I was reared and ordained, which has been very good to me, and which I have been privileged to serve in several capacities. Need it be said that I love still more the truth for which that church has stood since the day of its founding and to which, I pray, it may ever, by the grace of God, bear witness without compromise?

And if it should be that God in His inscrutable wisdom would permit the glory of the Christian Reformed Church to depart, that truth would still go marching on; for

Truth crushed to earth shall rise again,–
The eternal years of God are hers.

R. B. KUIPER

Grand Rapids, Michigan
February 1, 1959

The Church and Its Growth

I

THE CHURCH AND ITS GROWTH

During the first century of its existence the Christian Reformed Church was richly blessed of God. Its growth in membership is one piece of evidence. True, in comparison with many denominations on this continent, it is still small; yet the following statistics, taken from the centennial volume, *One Hundred Years in the New World,* indicate that its growth has been rapid.

	1857	1882	1907	1932	1957
Families	130*	2,976	13,344	23,376	47,991
Communicant Members	350*	4,439	25,175	56,006	113,231
Total Members	600*	14,787	66,879	113,353	211,454
Congregations	4	48	175	271	495

Percentagewise the church's growth has been well-nigh phenomenal. The following figures represent the approximate increase of its total membership in successive quarter-centuries: 2300%, 350%, 70%, 85%.

My parents took their children, me among them, to this country in 1891. Only thirty-four years had passed since the founding of the Christian Reformed Church. As a little boy I met face to face almost every minister in the denomination, Koene Vanden Bosch, its first minister, included; and I knew without exception which congregation each pastor was serving. I have also known personally every man that has served on the faculty of Calvin Seminary since its founding in 1876. How different is the situation which faces recent immigrants as they cast their lot with the Christian Reformed Church! The church is so much larger.

Throughout its first century the Christian Reformed Church has welcomed into its fellowship an almost constant flow of Dutch and German emigrants to the United States, and more

*Estimated

recently it has become a beneficiary of a veritable flood of emigration from The Netherlands to Canada. In view of these facts it may well be that its growth has been more rapid in the past than it is going to be in the future, but that is a matter of which no man can speak with certainty. Only God, who controls the destinies of nations as well as individuals, knows.

Another factor that has contributed significantly to the growth of the Christian Reformed Church is its emphasis on that aspect of the covenant of grace which concerns the children of believers. It regards infant baptism, not as a christening ceremony, nor merely as a dedicatory rite, but as a sacrament signifying and sealing, among other blessings, inclusion in the Christian church. The invisible church aside for the present, it counts all children of believing parents as members, full members — although, of course, not communicant members — of the visible church. And it bestows upon them the benefits of such membership, notably that of catechetical instruction. In consequence, the Christian Reformed Church has a far stronger hold on its children and young people than have most other Protestant denominations on theirs. And for that reason it has experienced a steady and vigorous growth from within. It must be admitted, however, that its growth has been due only in small part to evangelism.

Because of the church's growth in membership during the past hundred years a great many church edifices were built and many more were enlarged so as to make room for overflow audiences. The centennial book previously referred to contains photographs of several of our churches, and more than a few of them are truly imposing. When one considers the cost of those structures and adds the monetary value of Calvin College and Seminary, Dordt College at Sioux Center, Iowa, Trinity College of Chicagoland, the Reformed Bible Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the numerous Christian grade and high schools that our people have built, together with the investments in our far-flung fields of missions and evangelism as well as such institutions of mercy as Pine Rest Sanatorium and the Children's Retreat in Michigan, Elim Christian School in Illinois and California, Bethesda Sanatorium in Colorado, and Goffle Hill Sanatorium in New Jersey — all of which receive much of their financial support from Christian Reformed sources — one may

well stand amazed at the generosity of our people. Nor is the foregoing enumeration exhaustive. God has blessed us, not only with the material prosperity that makes such giving possible, but also with a willingness of heart to contribute freely to His church and kingdom. One is reminded of the willingness of the children of Israel to donate their valuables for the construction of the tabernacle. They brought so much that it actually became necessary to restrain them from giving (Exod. 36:5, 6). To be sure, we have not reached that point and it is unlikely that we ever will; yet it may be asserted without fear of contradiction that the generosity of the Christian Reformed people is evidence of the presence and powerful operation of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

* * *

Blessings often entail perils. Human nature being what it is and even saints continuing as sinners, it is not at all unusual for blessings to be abused. We of the Christian Reformed Church may well be on our guard lest we pervert the blessings just considered.

The danger is far from imaginary that we will seek to be great as the world is wont to count greatness; in other words, that we will stress externals at the expense of spiritual values. It is incomparably more important that church members "as lively stones" be "built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 2:5), than that they gather for worship in a costly stone edifice. And, while numerical growth may be due either to the saving operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men or to mere human effort, the growth of believers in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour (II Pet. 3:18) is invariably a spiritual blessing of divine bestowal.

Occasionally some of us look down with disdain on denominations which aim to be fully loyal to the Word of God and are determined to proclaim the gospel in all its fullness and purity but, for one reason or another, continue small and struggling. That attitude is highly reprehensible. It reveals on our part a mistaken sense of values. It indicates our failure to understand what it is that makes a church great. A church may have millions of members and great wealth besides, and hardly, or not at all, deserve to be called a church of Jesus Christ. A church may be

exceedingly small in number of members and physical assets and yet be truly great in the kingdom of heaven.

The danger is ever present that a growing church will become a broadening church in the evil sense of that term. It cannot be denied that the broadening of a church may be desirable. Time was when the Christian Reformed Church made use almost exclusively of the Dutch language and adhered to almost all the usages of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Americanization was desirable not only, but necessary. A broadening process was involved. Other examples of required broadening could be given. But when a church is prompted by a desire for broadening to receive into its communion persons who deny the most cardinal doctrines of Holy Writ, it is in process of degenerating into a synagogue of Satan. There are in these United States denominations which knowingly harbor among their members, and even in their ministry, such as profess a strong belief in the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man and a high regard for the ethical teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly for the golden rule, but scornfully reject the Scriptural teaching that Christ's death on the cross was a substitutionary sacrifice for the expiation of sin and the satisfaction of divine justice. Such churches have become so broad as to exceed the bounds of Christianity and thus have forfeited every just claim to Christianity. May God forbid that the Christian Reformed Church should move even a little in that direction!

When a church enjoys great statistical prosperity, the sin of complacency lies at the door. And when such prosperity is accompanied by orthodoxy, as is the case in the instance of the Christian Reformed Church, complacency is knocking vigorously on the door and is vociferously demanding admittance. Thus it has come to pass that we frequently evaluate other denominations, not by the absolute standard of Holy Writ, but by the relative standard of our own beliefs and practices, and that, instead of judging ourselves by the high standard of the Word of God, we are too ready to assume that we cannot be wrong. The great Head of the church has told us He abominates complacency in His body. He commanded His apostle John to write to the angel of the church at Laodicea: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and

knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:17-19).

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True though it is that a church must be on its guard against the overvaluation of statistical growth, the addition of living members is an inestimable divine blessing. In *The Acts of the Apostles* we are told that about three thousand souls were converted on the day of Pentecost and were received by baptism into the Christian church (2:41), that soon the believers at Jerusalem alone constituted a "multitude" (4:32), and that "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (5:14).

Thus the question arises whether we, the members of the Christian Reformed Church, can contribute to the future growth of our church. Before that question is answered, two truths must needs be stressed: only God-made additions are truly additions, and in the making of such additions God is sovereign. It was the divine Lord Jesus Christ, not Peter or his fellow apostles, who added daily to the Jerusalem church such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). And He added those very members that were added because, sovereignly ordained as they were to eternal life (Acts 13:48), it pleased Him to open their hearts, as He subsequently opened the heart of Lydia, that they gave heed to the preaching of the Word (Acts 16:14).

That having been said, it must be added that God is wont to use His children as His co-laborers unto the growth of His church. The apostle Paul was aware of that. Therefore, having stated that he had planted and Apollos had watered, and that neither he that plants is anything nor he that waters but God that gives the increase, he went on to say: "We are labourers together with God" (I Cor. 3:6, 7, 9). The same apostle, after making the universal declaration: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," put the rhetorical question: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not be-

lieved? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:13, 14). Hence the Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into His harvest (Matt. 9:38).

The Christian Reformed Church has been called an "introvert" church. By that is meant that until recently it concentrated very largely, one could say too nearly exclusively, on the welfare of its members and paid scant attention to those without the fold. It must be granted that this characterization contains more than a modicum of truth. As was previously remarked, the rapid growth of the Christian Reformed Church in the first century of its existence was only to a limited extent the result of evangelization. However, to its credit it can be said that today it is willing to make that admission and is striving to overcome its unbalance. Let us hope that it will not now become unbalanced in the opposite direction. Action and reaction being equal and opposite, not merely in the realm of physics, the danger that this will occur is not altogether negligible. Many a church of this day is zealous for missions but is so "extrovert" as to neglect sadly the religious education of its own children and the building up of its adult members in the faith. May the Christian Reformed Church be truly zealous in the discharge of its responsibility both to those within and to those without. Great missionary that Paul was, he worked hard also at "the perfecting of the saints, . . . the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). The fact remains that one of our greatest present needs is a passion for evangelism.

By diligently declaring the Word of God to all within reach, and by humbly and fervently praying that it may please the Holy Spirit to apply that Word to the hearts of all who hear, the Christian Reformed Church may contribute importantly to its future growth.

° ° °

As was already intimated, there is a relationship between the growth of a church and its requirements for membership. But that relationship is not nearly as simple as is sometimes supposed. A church with high standards of membership may on that account have few additions, but it may also be richly blessed of God with many additions. Of that the early church at Jerusalem affords a striking example. Just when its standards proved

to be so exacting that no man dared to join, amazingly "believers were the more added . . . multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:13, 14). On the other hand, a church with low standards may for that reason have numerous additions, or it may incur the divine disfavor and receive few additions; and, obviously, it is also possible that such a church will be overrun with nominal believers.

Thus the question arises what, according to the Word of God, are the requirements for church membership. The New Testament sums them up in one — faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" they replied only: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." And when he and the members of his household believed, they were baptized and thus received into the Christian church (Acts 16:30-34).

At this point attention must be called to an exceedingly serious mistake which many churches make and which the Christian Reformed Church should take great pains to avoid. It is simply to take the word of a prospective member that he is a believer and to make no earnest inquiry as to the validity of his profession. Especially today, when the phrase *to believe in Christ* is used so exceedingly loosely and often means no more than to have a high regard for the carpenter of Nazareth as an ethical teacher and an example of high morality, such procedure must be condemned. Although the officers of a church cannot discern the hearts of men, it is their solemn duty to apply certain tests to him who would by profession of faith become affiliated with the body of Christ. Those tests are three in number.

First, it must be ascertained whether the candidate for membership possesses that knowledge of Holy Scripture which is both a prerequisite and a constitutive element of saving faith. True, it is impossible, and also unnecessary, to draw up an exhaustive list of the Scriptural teachings with which he must be familiar and to which he must consent, but it is not difficult to specify some of such teachings. To select a few, he must accept the doctrine of the Trinity, including of course the deity of Christ, and he must assent to the substitutionary character of Christ's atoning death. The *Heidelberg Catechism* tells us that true faith is not only, but also, "a sure knowledge, whereby I hold for truth

all that God has revealed to us in His Word" (Lord's Day VII, Answer 21).

It must further be ascertained so far as that is humanly possible whether the candidate for membership possesses the very essence of saving faith. That essence is trust in Christ alone for salvation. The applicant must look away from himself for eternal life and solely to Christ crucified and resurrected. Under conviction of sin, he must abandon himself to the person of Christ. He must say: "Nothing in my hand I bring," and "Hangs my helpless soul on Thee." In short, he must rely for salvation exclusively on the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Finally, it must be ascertained whether the candidate has resolved by the grace of God to live a life of gratitude for all that Christ has done, does, and is for him. Acknowledging Christ as Lord is a consequence, also the proof, of having received Him in faith as Saviour. More precisely, the recognition of Christ as Saviour and Lord are two aspects of one act. Therefore, the Christian Reformed Church is right in demanding of applicants for membership that they sever their connection, if any, with that false religion which is known as Masonry.

Among conservative Calvinists there has long been a difference of opinion as to the requisites for membership in a Reformed church. Roughly speaking, there may be said to be two traditions — the Scottish and the Dutch. The former would accept any true believer as a member. For historical reasons the Orthodox Presbyterian Church stands in that tradition. Only its officers are required to express adherence to the church's confessions. The latter would receive into membership only such believers as are self-consciously Reformed. That the Christian Reformed Church represents that tradition appears from Article 61 of its *Church Order,* which reads: "None shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper except those who . . . have made a confession of the Reformed religion." That can only mean that agreement with the Forms of Unity is requisite for membership.

It may seem that these traditions lie far apart and are even contradictory. It would also seem that, humanly speaking, churches holding to the second tradition have far more restricted opportunities for growth than do churches holding to the former. And yet, it can be shown that the two, although not identical, resemble each other closely.

When a Reformed church is willing to receive into its fellowship only those who profess the Reformed faith, does it thereby bar from the Christian church all who do not make that profession? Most certainly not. It would not think of excluding any true believer from the body of Christ. The most it can possibly mean to say is that those believers who are not self-consciously Reformed may not be members of one given manifestation of that body.

When a Reformed church willingly receives into its fellowship any true believer in Christ, does it thereby say that being Reformed is not required for membership? Emphatically not. In a most real sense every true believer is Reformed. Such a believer is one who trusts in Christ *alone* for salvation. Instead of trying to save himself, whether by works or character, he casts himself unreservedly upon the grace of God in Christ. But salvation by grace is the very essence of the Reformed faith. Thus in his heart of hearts, his inmost being, every true believer, no matter by what intellectual puzzles his mind may be confused, is a Calvinist.

As a matter of fact, the Christian Reformed Church has never interpreted Article 61 in such a way as to require that every member be a Reformed theologian. As regards adherence to the Forms of Unity, it has always distinguished between its office-bearers and other members. Of the former — together with teachers in Calvin College and Seminary — it demands actual subscription to the creeds, but not of the latter. To be sure, all who make profession of faith must answer affirmatively the question: "Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God stedfastly to continue in this profession?" Yet it is not even required of candidates for communicant membership that they have *read* the church's doctrinal standards. Many never have. Thus it has come to pass that only by some stretching of the term can it be claimed that all members in full communion of the Christian Reformed Church are *self-consciously Reformed.* It is clear that both in theory and in practice the traditions under consideration tend strongly to converge.

Whether the Christian Reformed Church is performing its

full duty on the score under discussion may well be questioned. Here I must record an amazing observation. Through personal contacts I have discovered that those who have recently joined the Christian Reformed Church as a result of its evangelistic efforts are often more self-consciously Reformed than are those who were born and reared in our midst. I have met members of long standing who had doubts about the validity of infant baptism, denied the Reformed doctrine of reprobation, and held that unregenerate man has the ability to believe in Christ. I have encountered at least one who was an outright universalist. Such instances likely are exceptional; the last named is, no doubt, highly exceptional. But not nearly all our members of long standing excel in Reformed self-consciousness. On the other hand, I have met, not a few but many, recent converts who in their profession of faith were truly enthusiastic about the five points of Calvinism.

Most certainly our great aim must be to persuade men to believe in Christ. Every one who does that, is Reformed at heart. But we must also labor to make men self-consciously Reformed. To quote a great American Calvinist, they must become Reformed "in thought and feeling and action." Teaching the Word of God is the prime means to that end. Of such self-consciousness there are degrees. Here, too, perfection was never attained but must be sought. Generally speaking, adult believers may be expected to possess more of it than do our youth, and our youth, on making profession of faith, may be expected to have more of it than do those who recently came into the fold. But it should be our constant striving so to teach that all concerned may acquire much of it. In the great commission Jesus has told us that also those who are outside the church and the kingdom must be taught. By teaching are they to be made disciples.

By faithfully performing the task of producing self-conscious Calvinists we may contribute to the growth of the Christian Reformed Church, not merely in numbers, but in soundness and strength.

The Church and Orthodoxy

II

THE CHURCH AND ORTHODOXY

The Christian Reformed Church can hardly be said to be widely known, but where it is known it has a reputation for orthodoxy. John H. Kromminga appropriately entitled his history of the denomination *A Study in Orthodoxy.* To whatever extent its individual members may err, it is officially orthodox. This chapter will have that official orthodoxy in view.

That orthodoxy is a virtue should go altogether without saying. And yet, in this day and age, precisely that must be said with all possible emphasis. A few decades ago modernists proclaimed from the housetops that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life, and, believe it or not, more than a few self-styled fundamentalists echoed that slogan. By now the theological climate has changed. More than one neo-orthodox leader is stressing doctrine. There is no telling how many volumes Karl Barth will need to set forth in full what he calls *Church Dogmatics.* However, let no one suppose that the generation of those who stress morals at the expense of theology has died out or is about to die out. Nothing of the kind is the case. From a majority of pulpits little is being proclaimed but a superficial moralism, a be-good and do-good gospel that, like the gospel which was casting its spell over the churches of Galatia in the apostolic age, in reality is no gospel at all (Gal. 1:6, 7). Even in Lent and on Good Friday prominent preachers proclaim Christ only as an example for men to follow. We are told to "face the inevitable," as did Christ when He prayed in Gethsemane: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt," and to "subject our lower self to our higher self," even as Jesus is said to have done when, in reply to the taunts of men, He refused to come down from the cross, although He could have done that. In addition, the exceedingly sad fact must be recorded that in numerous instances those who would once more stress doctrine teach, not

the doctrines of the infallible Word of God and the illuminated historic church, the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude:3), but doctrines rooted in the false philosophies of men. Thus it has come to pass that in many ecclesiastical circles the term *orthodoxy* has become one of opprobrium instead of distinction and the Christian Reformed Church is ridiculed rather than honored for its orthodoxy.

° ° °

What do we mean when we laud the Christian Reformed Church for its orthodoxy?

First of all, we mean that it regards the Bible as the supernaturally inspired self-revelation of God; that it believes that the human authors of the Bible were so controlled by the Holy Spirit that, not as mere automata but as individuals, each with his own background and personality, they recorded the very thoughts and words which God wanted them to record; that, therefore, the Bible was inerrant in the original manuscripts, the autographs; that by a wondrous providence God watched over His revelation as it passed through the hands of numerous fallible copyists; in short, that the Bible is the one and only infallible rule for faith and conduct.

Here a few quotations from the *Belgic Confession,* one of our doctrinal standards, are in order. "We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that *men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit,* as the apostle Peter says; and that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed word to writing; and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures" (Article III). "We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged" (Article IV). "We receive all these books [the sixty-six books of our Bible], and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are

from God, and because they carry the evidence thereof in themselves" (Article V). "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. . . . For since it is forbidden to *add unto or take away anything from the Word of God,* it does thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects" (Article VII).

Thus orthodoxy rejects the view, prevalent among both liberal and neo-orthodox theologians, that in the Bible truth and error lie intermingled; the view, held by Roman Catholics and mystics, that divine revelation as contained in the Bible needs to be supplemented, whether by tradition, the inner light, the Christian consciousness, or religious experience; the view, taken by modernists generally, that the Bible is a fallible record of what certain pious Hebrews thought about God rather than an infallible record of what God revealed concerning Himself to those Hebrews; the view of Karl Barth and his followers that the Word of God does not come to all who read the Bible or hear it read, but that the Bible *becomes* the Word of God in those instances in which God is pleased to apply it to individuals; and certainly also the view, strongly advocated by such dialectical theologians as Reinhold Niebuhr, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich, that the Bible is in great need of being "demythologized"; that is to say, that much of Bible history — the account in Genesis 3 of the fall of man, for one example — although revelation of profound truth, is not history in the generally accepted sense of that term.

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The question as to what we mean when lauding the Christian Reformed Church for its orthodoxy requires a further answer. We mean that it adheres to that interpretation of the Bible at which the historic Christian church has arrived under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

The Christian church is not infallible, as is the Bible. Therefore its interpretation of Scripture is not to be equated with Scripture itself. But the infallible Bible teaches plainly that the church is *enlightened* by the Spirit of truth. When, in the parts of Caesarea Philippi, Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord complimented him: "Blessed

art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven," and then He went on to say: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:16-18). The rock here spoken of as the foundation of the church is not merely Peter, nor merely his confession, but rather the confessing Peter as representative of the twelve apostles. Jesus taught plainly that the truth confessed by the apostles is the foundation of His church and that the church will ever abide on that foundation, all hell to the contrary notwithstanding. When the Saviour was about to return to the Father, He promised His disciples the Comforter to take His place, and of Him He said: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Beyond all doubt, that promise was intended for the apostles as the nucleus of the Christian church and, therefore, for the church of all ages. For that reason the apostle Paul could describe the church, the generic church, as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). Thus it has come about that, in spite of countless heresies found in the church at different times, there runs through the history of the church a line of truth or orthodoxy, and the Word of God assures us that this line will never be broken. Let it be said again, the church is not infallible, as is the Bible. Yet in a sense infallibility may be ascribed to the church. To the end of time there will be a body of true believers confessing the truth.

At different times the illuminated church has formulated the truth in documents known as creeds. For example, there are the ancient ecumenical creeds known as the *Apostles' Creed,* the *Nicene Creed,* and the *Athanasian Creed.* They are products of the Spirit's illumination of the Christian church as a whole. The Christian Reformed Church has seen fit to publish them in its *Psalter Hymnal.*

In the middle ages the Church of Rome departed far from the truth of Holy Writ. To name some of its most grievous errors, it taught that the church imparts saving grace to sinners in the administration of the sacraments and that outside the church there is no salvation; it rejected the sole mediatorship of Christ between God and sinners and set up deceased saints, particularly Mary, "the mother of God," as additional mediators; it substituted

the meritoriousness of good works for justification by faith alone; by its doctrine of purgatory it denied that the souls of believers go to be with Christ immediately upon their departure from the body. It seemed that truth had perished from the church and the church from the earth. But then it was that the Spirit of truth raised up the sixteenth-century Reformers. The Reformation in its essence was a return to Holy Scripture. Truth, crushed to earth, rose again and came to be formulated in numerous confessions and catechisms as the faith of Protestantism. True, from the outset Protestantism was divided into two main streams, the Lutheran and the Reformed. Each wrote its own creeds, but significantly John Calvin sought to unite the two on the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* as a working basis. The faith of Protestantism is an expression of orthodoxy, and to it the Christian Reformed Church subscribes.

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Again the question must be put what we mean when we laud the Christian Reformed Church for its orthodoxy. We mean that it adheres to the Reformed faith.

Just what is the Reformed faith? On that question there is considerable misunderstanding even among those who profess to hold it. Few things are as important for the Christian Reformed Church as a clear insight into this matter on the part of its members.

The doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church are the *Belgic Confession,* the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Canons of Dort.* Collectively they are known as the Forms of Unity. They are statements of the Reformed faith. Not every Christian is willing to subscribe to every point of doctrine made in them, nor is every Protestant. There are those who, while in accord with the ecumenical creeds of Christendom, do not see their way clear to agree to each and every teaching of the Reformed creeds. There are also those who, while in accord with those doctrines which all Protestants accept, do not see their way clear to agree to each and every teaching of the Reformed creeds. To be more specific, there are those who believe the doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Christ, but find certain teachings in the Reformed confessions to which they cannot subscribe; and there are those who believe the doctrine of justifica-

tion by faith only, but likewise find certain teachings in the Reformed confessions to which they cannot subscribe. It follows that the Reformed faith goes beyond those doctrines which all Christians confess and also beyond those doctrines which all Protestants confess. It is more specific than either of these.

However, let no one think that the Reformed faith is a mere addition, whether small or great, to the Christian faith and the Protestant faith. It is nothing of the kind. To suppose that it is, constitutes a common and most serious error. How often the opinion is expressed that the Reformed faith consists of the so-called five points of Calvinism – absolute predestination, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the eternal security of believers. It does indeed include those points and they are essential to it. But it is ever so much more comprehensive than that. It embraces the whole of the Christian faith and the whole of the Protestant faith, as well as those five points. This means that the Reformed faith is exceedingly broad. It takes in every truth which the Christian church has ever distilled from the Word of God. Better even than that, it has room for every truth which remains to be distilled from Holy Writ. Nothing that is true is foreign to it. Its adherents willingly admit that they have not nearly exhausted the Scriptures, and they strive zealously toward the identification of their faith with Scriptural theology in its entirety.

Attention must be called to another prevalent and extremely serious undervaluation of the Reformed faith. Many regard it as one of several interpretations of Christianity, all of them more or less unbalanced and all of them equally valid, or approximately so. It has been argued, for instance, that Protestantism, in teaching justification by faith only, is on better ground than is Rome, but that Rome has a more exalted and more Scriptural view of the church. As a matter of fact, Rome's conception of the church goes far beyond Scripture. For another example, it has often been said that Christian theology consists of the two hemispheres of divine sovereignty and human responsibility; that Calvinism stresses the former, Arminianism the latter; and that the two are equally right as well as equally one-sided. But that is a caricature of Calvinism. Human responsibility is a corollary of divine sovereignty, and precisely because the Reformed faith stresses divine sovereignty strongly, it stresses human responsibility no

less strongly. The truth of the matter is that the Reformed faith is the Christian faith in its most comprehensive and consistent formulation and that Calvinism is Christianity in its purest and most precise expression. And that is easily shown.

The Bible has been called the book of salvation. In distinction from the book of general revelation, it is that. Nature and history do not tell us how sinners may be saved; the Bible tells us all we need to know on that important subject. The sum and substance of what it tells us is that salvation is of grace. Now that is another way of saying that it is of God. From beginning to end it is of God, the triune God. God the Father planned salvation from eternity. Out of the fallen human race He chose certain persons in Christ unto life everlasting. And the reason why He chose them lay in God, not in them. In a word, He chose them in sovereign love. The Son of God merited salvation. To that end He did two things: by His suffering, particularly His death on the accursed cross, He paid the debt of the elect to the last farthing; and by His active obedience to the law of God He merited for them eternal life. Nothing remains for the sinner to merit. The Holy Spirit applies salvation. He imparts spiritual life to those dead sinners whom the Father chose and the Son designed to save and thus renders them able and willing to accept Christ and His saving benefits by faith. It follows that it is no exaggeration whatever to say that salvation is a hundred percent of sovereign grace. To be sure, sinners are commanded to believe, but they obey that command by the grace of the Holy Spirit; and believers are enjoined to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, but they are both obligated and enabled to do that by God's working in them continuously to their last breath both to will and to do (Phil. 2:12, 13). Such is the central theme, not only of Paul's epistles, but of the whole of Scripture. And such is also the very heart of the Reformed faith.

In the apostolic church salvation by grace was proclaimed unqualifiedly. Before long this doctrine began to be compromised. In the fifth century a British monk by the name of Pelagius denied it in outright fashion. Then the Spirit of truth raised up Augustine to reassert it. Again the church weakened. Semi-Pelagianism prevailed, and in course of time the doctrine of salvation by grace was lost almost completely out of sight. In the sixteenth century the Spirit of truth raised up the Protestant

Reformers to reassert it. Surprisingly soon thereafter Arminius of the Reformed churches of Holland and the synergists socalled in Lutheranism did violence to this doctrine. Now the Spirit of truth used the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Assembly to reassert it. Both of those illustrious bodies taught the five points of Calvinism, which add up to the doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace. Today again this truth has fallen on evil days; few and far between are the churches that do not corrupt it; but it has been upheld uncompromisingly by such eminent Reformed theologians, to name but a few, as Charles Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield in this country, together with Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck of The Netherlands. In brief, the doctrine of salvation by the sovereign grace of the triune God has been upheld in the Reformed theology as in no other. That doctrine is the very core of Scripture and of the Reformed faith alike. Precisely that is the glory of the Reformed faith. It is consistent orthodoxy. And such is the orthodoxy of the Christian Reformed Church.

As was already said, not every Christian and not every Protestant subscribes to the Reformed faith. And yet, that statement expresses by no means the whole truth. Not with his intellect, to be sure, yet in his inmost being, his heart of hearts, every Christian accepts the doctrine of salvation by grace. The saying that on his knees before God an Arminian is a Calvinist contains much more than a modicum of truth. In theory the Arminian makes God dependent on man; in his prayers he is wont to confess man's complete dependence on God. Without any hesitation the assertion may be made that every Christian, no matter what ecclesiastical label he may bear, is essentially a Calvinist. A Christian is a person who believes in Christ. And faith in Christ is "a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel" *(Westminster Shorter Catechism,* Answer 86). In that definition the term *alone* is supremely important. Implicit in it is the entire Scriptural doctrine of salvation by grace. Warfield was quite right when, in the article "Calvinism" in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge,* he said: "Whoever recognizes in the recesses of his soul his utter dependence on God; whoever in all his thought of salvation hears in his heart of hearts the echo of the *soli Deo gloria* of the evangelical profes-

sion — by whatever name he may call himself, or by whatever intellectual puzzles his logical understanding may be confused — Calvinism recognizes as implicitly a Calvinist, and as only requiring to permit these fundamental principles — which underlie and give its body to all true religion — to work themselves freely and fully out in thought and feeling and action, to become explicitly a Calvinist."

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Once more the question must be faced what we mean when we laud the Christian Reformed Church for its orthodoxy.

History tells us how difficult it is for Christians to keep their theological balance. For that matter, no Christian is perfectly balanced. Time and again there have been those who stressed one teaching of Holy Scripture out of all proportion to others, rode theological hobbies well-nigh to death, and thus became guilty of sectarianism. The history of doctrine tells of those who stressed man's dependence on God so as practically to rule out his accountability to God, and thus fell into the error of antinomianism; of those who stressed Christian doctrine out of all proportion to Christian conduct, and thus succumbed to orthodoxism; of those who stressed the believer's holiness at the expense of his continued struggle with sin as depicted in Romans 7, and thus embraced the error of perfectionism; of those who stressed the Scriptural doctrine of reprobation to the extent of denying an attitude of favor on the part of God to all mankind, and thus denied common grace; of those who insisted so strongly on patterning the church of their day after the apostolic church that they laid claim to such charisms as speaking with tongues and miraculous healing, and thus became fanatic. Examples could easily be multiplied. Let it be said emphatically, in the history of the Christian church unbalance has repeatedly become the mother of heresy.

By the grace of God the Christian Reformed Church throughout the first hundred years of its existence has remained remarkably well balanced in its theology. To that end God used our leading theologians. At no time did we lose our theological sanity. By and large we were kept from extremism, and our church was never in danger of degenerating into a sect. Contrariwise, it is in the manifest succession of that church which Scripture characterizes as "the pillar and ground of the truth"

(I Tim. 3:15). It stands in the grand tradition of Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Hodge, Thornwell, Warfield, Vos, Orr, Kuyper, Bavinck, and Machen.

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There is a big difference between orthodoxy and orthodoxism. The former is a good, the latter an evil. An orthodox church must ever be on its guard against orthodoxism.

There are different types of orthodoxism. Three will be noted.

In its absolute sense orthodoxism is an intellectual acceptance of the truth without a preceding change of heart and without a subsequent and consequent change of life. It is dead orthodoxy. It is synonymous with what theologians are wont to call historical or speculative faith. It was the faith of King Agrippa. Said Paul to him: "Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest" (Acts 26:27). But Agrippa, instead of being persuaded to become a Christian, continued to serve the lusts of his unregenerate heart in a dissolute life. It is the faith which James ascribed to demons and certain men when he wrote: "Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe, and shudder" (Jas. 2:19, ASV). That there may be such orthodoxism within the Christian Reformed Church cannot be denied, but far be it from me to accuse my fellow member of it. Let God be the judge. And may His grace keep me from the company of demons.

The term *orthodoxism* may also be used in the relative sense of acceptance of the truth with little relevance to conduct. A period of such orthodoxism followed hard upon the creed-writing period in which the Protestant Reformation culminated. It would hardly be correct to say that too much emphasis was put on sound doctrine, but it would be quite correct to assert that too little stress was placed on the implications of sound doctrine for the Christian life of holiness and service. That situation helped account for the rise of Pietism and Methodism. They were reactions from the orthodoxism found in the churches of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When an individual or a group stresses the believer's dependence on the grace of God for leading the life of a Christian to the practical exclusion of his responsibility for such conduct and thus lapses into passiv-

ism and quietism, orthodoxism has put in its appearance. Or when a church is so completely engrossed in doctrinal controversy as to neglect evangelism, it has fallen into the sin of orthodoxism. Few will dare to claim for the Christian Reformed Church complete innocence of such orthodoxism.

There is a third type. Its avoidance, too, may well be a concern of the Christian Reformed Church. The reference is to doctrinal complacency or static orthodoxy. When a church has excelled in orthodoxy from the time of its founding and still excels in that virtue after a hundred years, the danger becomes imminent that it is going to rest on its oars or, to change the metaphor, is going to retire on its laurels. A church may never suppose that it has exhausted the Word of God. Out of that treasure it must ever bring forth old things, to be sure, but also new (Matt. 13:52). As a matter of fact, the Holy Spirit has throughout the centuries led the church of Christ into the truth progressively. This does not mean that there has been uninterrupted progress. Often, very often, there has been deterioration. Therefore the history of doctrine is not a straight line running upward, but rather a zigzag figure with "downs" as well as "ups." Yet in the long run the trend has been upward. It is extremely important that a church be conservative. It must by all means hold fast that which it has in order that no man may take its crown (Rev. 3:11). It is no less important that a church be progressive. Abiding upon the Word of God, it must keep building upon that foundation. Failure to do the former spells destruction. Failure to do the latter can only result in petrifaction.

May the Spirit of truth keep the Christian Reformed Church orthodox! May the same Spirit save it from orthodoxism!

The Church and Heterodoxy

III

THE CHURCH AND HETERODOXY

Let no one say that the Christian Reformed Church came into being because of mere incompatibility. Beyond all doubt, its founders were motivated primarily by a zeal for sound doctrine. That is to say, they detected in the denomination from which they departed the beginnings of heterodoxy.

During the first hundred years of its existence the church has not entirely escaped the threat of heterodoxy, but it has consistently withstood that threat. Three instances will be named, all of which occurred during my ministry and in close succession.

In 1918 a minister was deposed, not, as has often been said, because of his premillennialism, but because of his dispensationalism. He denied the unity of the church of the old and new dispensations as well as the kingship of Christ over His church.

In the early twenties a seminary professor was charged by his colleagues with being influenced unduly by the higher criticism. Unfortunately that matter was never fully clarified. It certainly was not a case of the defendant's being all wrong and his accusers' being all right. Several of the ablest ministers in the church inclined to the opinion that the professor concerned should be upheld. However, when he refused to defend his position before the Synod of 1922 on the ground that certain members of that body, by their denial of the doctrine of common grace, were disqualified from passing judgment on his teaching, the defense was stymied and Synod dismissed him from office. However much one may regret certain aspects of the procedure in that case, the church must be credited with unwillingness to tolerate so much as the semblance of theological liberalism.

Hardly had that case been concluded when certain ministers who had actively opposed the professor just referred to were

found guilty of departure from the Reformed faith by their denial of common grace. It was the Synod of 1924 which came to that conclusion and drew up the now famous "three points" on that doctrine.

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Roughly speaking, the first hundred years of the Christian Reformed Church may be described as a period of isolation. Not completely, to be sure, yet largely, it lived apart from the American ecclesiastical and theological scene. That made it comparatively easy for the church to resist the various forms in which heterodoxy asserted itself on that scene. In fact, of many of those forms it was hardly aware. It gave little attention, by and large, to the errors found in other denominations and rather comfortably proceeded on its own safe way. Not even the instruction given in the seminary can be said to have excelled in contemporaneity. At least as much attention was wont to be paid to the heresies of bygone centuries as to current departures from the faith.

By now the Christian Reformed Church is rapidly coming out of its isolation. And that means that the danger of its being affected by the heresies of the day is not only greater than it was heretofore, but peculiarly imminent. Generally speaking, the church is neither forewarned nor forearmed against prevalent heterodoxy. Its position closely resembles that of a youngster who is starting school. It is almost sure to contract certain children's diseases because it is now for the first time exposed to them and has not acquired any immunity to them. *The Book of Judges* tells of a time when the tribe of Dan wanted more *Lebensraum*. Spies were sent out to find a place suitable for occupation. They "came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; . . . and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man" (18:7). On returning home, the spies advised the Danites to seize that city and predicted that it could be done with ease. Their advice was taken, and their prediction came true. Because of its one-time isolation the Christian Reformed Church, too, could become an easy prey to attack.

To describe the situation in different terms, what makes the Christian Reformed Church of today peculiarly vulnerable to

heterodoxy is a sad dearth of doctrinal discernment. We are not nearly as alert to danger as we ought to be. Let me give a few bits of proof. One of our elderly ministers once told me he had repeatedly listened to Harry Emerson Fosdick's radio preaching and had never detected any heresy in it. It seemed not to have occurred to him that a preacher's liberalism often comes to clearer light in what he does not say than in what he says. I myself once heard Fosdick preach on an Easter afternoon. He made out a strong case for personal immortality but, of course, left Christ's bodily resurrection severely alone for the simple reason that he was certain it had not occurred. Every once in a while a modernist is quoted with unqualified approval in our publications and from our pulpits. Now it goes without saying that there is no liberal under the sun who has not uttered many a quotable truth. Yet such procedure, especially if repeated, will leave our unsuspecting people with the impression that the person quoted is a trustworthy leader. Thus it has come to pass that there are those among us who esteem, for example, Henry P. Van Dusen and John C. Bennett, both of Union Theological Seminary of New York, as safe guides in the realm of theology. If we had a more thorough acquaintance with the dialectical theology, we would be less tolerant than we are of the teachings of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich. In the academic year 1952-53 I taught a course in Catechetics to both the middlers and the seniors of Calvin Seminary. One assignment was the writing of a critical review of Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture*. I informed the students that my giving this assignment did not imply anything like unqualified approval of that work, but rather recognition of it as a classic that every minister should have read. Practically all the reviews showed a due appreciation of Bushnell's objections to the revivalism of his day and of his insistence on Christian training for the children of believers, but not nearly every student had detected the naturalism that mars this famous book — a naturalism which came to expression also, although in a different way, in the same author's moral influence theory of the atonement. In *Christian Nurture* it appears in the teaching that children inherit from their Christian parents a natural tendency to Christianity. It is generally known that the Christian Reformed Church, after some years of membership in the

National Association of Evangelicals, severed its connection with that organization. I am not now concerned to pass judgment, either favorable or unfavorable, on that action. But the sad fact must be recorded that some of our people, when told that Arminianism, dispensationalism, and Pentecostalism are more or less prevalent in that association, express the opinion that such errors, if indeed they are errors, rate as inconsequential. Surely, it is high time for the Christian Reformed Church to wake up, to scan its ecclesiastical and theological surroundings, to take due note of the good in other denominations, to be sure, but also of the evil, and to be on the alert for contemporaneous heterodoxy.

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A considerable number of the theological errors of our day are truly alluring. The more does it behoove us to be vigilant.

One often hears it said that the old liberalism is thoroughly discredited and has been supplanted by the new orthodoxy. That many erstwhile liberals have turned to so-called neo-orthodoxy is a fact, but he who supposes that the old liberalism has had its day is gullible indeed. True, the recent world wars have convinced many a liberal that human nature is not as good as it was once thought to be, but it may not be assumed that he now subscribes to the doctrine of total depravity and the necessity of supernatural regeneration. The old liberalism was characterized by rejection of the supernatural, hence denial of the miracles of the Bible, particularly the virgin birth of Jesus and His bodily resurrection, in which the supernatural looms so very large. Today's liberal is just as sure that belief in miracles is a relic of "the pre-scientific age," and he blandly asserts that belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is orthodoxism but the presence of the living spirit of Christ in one's heart is the essence of Christianity. Sad to say, that sort of sanctimonious talk is being bandied about with increasing frequency also among evangelicals. Obviously, Christ dwells in the believer and that constitutes him a Christian, but Christ's bodily resurrection remains one of several historical events which constitute the foundation of Christianity and without which the whole of Christianity would topple into ruins like a house of cards. Said Paul: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. . . . And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in

your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (I Cor. 15:14, 17, 18). Another characteristic of the old liberalism was its substitution of subjective religious experience for the objective revelation of God in Holy Writ. In fact, the Bible itself was said to be nothing but a fallible record of the religious experience of certain God-fearing men. That error is riding about as high today as ever it has been.

The dialectical theology, popularly known as Barthianism, presents a most attractive front. It claims to be based upon the Word of God contained in the Bible and thus to have returned to the foundation of the sixteenth-century Reformation, to have put liberalism to rout, and to be upholding the precious doctrine of salvation by grace. Thus it has come to pass that Barthianism has begun to make inroads even upon Dutch Calvinistic circles. Witness a publication bearing the name *De Strijdende Kerk*, at least a few Reformed ministers show signs of having fallen under its spell. What has happened in Holland can happen here. Yet basically Barthianism is modernism. Its evaluation of the Bible differs radically from that of the Protestant Reformers. For them the Bible was the very Word of God; according to Barthianism the Bible is the *source* of the Word of God and in some instances *becomes* the Word of God, but it also contains much human error. That such a view of the Bible would cast a dark pall over the whole of the dialectical theology is inevitable. And so, to name a few examples, much of Bible history is relegated to the limbo of the "supra-historical" and the "mythological," and Barth's doctrine of election, which, he himself insists, is basic to the whole of his theology, is far removed from Holy Scripture.

One of the most ancient heresies in Christendom is that of universal salvation. It was carried into Christianity from paganism in the third century by Clement of Alexandria and his pupil Origen. It has never died out. And today we are witnessing a mighty resurgence of it. Influential theologians of both the liberal and the dialectical school are advocating it. One of its foremost American exponents is Nels F. S. Ferré. It is being proclaimed boldly even in churches with Reformed doctrinal standards. Recently a Presbyterian minister wrote an article on the subject, "What's Happened to Hell?" and in that article he said: "If love is love and God is God, heaven can't be heaven until nobody remains in hell. Love cannot be smug in the presence of another's

misfortune; and the love of heaven cannot rejoice except as all are saved from their follies and their hurts." That statement reveals how universalists arrive at their conclusion. They stress the love of God at the expense of such of His attributes as holiness and justice. It need not be denied that here we are face to face with mystery. God is love indeed. He is infinite love. His love is incomparably greater and stronger than we mortals can imagine. Far be it from us to permit any other divine attribute to detract aught from His love. Why a God of such love does not save all men we cannot say. But that He does not save all men we know, for He has told us so in His Word. And in that Word He has related that fact to His perfect holiness and His righteous wrath against sin. We also dare to say that, precisely because the love of God which unbelievers spurn is infinite, the justice of God demands that they suffer everlasting punishment. God is infinite in all His attributes. To say that God is primarily love and only secondarily holy and just, is to analyze the Infinite and savors of sacrilege. Let us be as little children and humbly rest content with God's revelation of Himself in Holy Writ. And in His presence may our words be few. Let us be done with speculative theology.

Here attention must be called to a recent book which may easily lead many a devout soul astray. I have in mind *Agape and Eros* by Anders Nygren, Bishop of Lund, Sweden (translation by Philip S. Watson published by the Westminster Press, 1953). *Agape* and *Eros* are two Greek words for *love.* However, they are said to "represent two quite distinct ideas of love, one of them prevalent in the ancient Hellenistic world, where it was called *Eros,* and the other characteristic of primitive Christianity, to which it was known as *Agape*" (p. viii). *Agape* is said to be selfless love; *Eros,* self-interested love. To quote again from the 1953 American edition, "*Agape* is a love that loves to give, freely, selflessly; *Eros* is a love that loves to get, a highly refined form of self-interest and self-seeking" (p. xiii). We are told that *Agape* is the love which God is and which He bestows on sinners, the love which believers bear toward God when they surrender themselves completely to Him, the love which the children of God can show toward their fellow men; whereas *Eros* at its best is the love by which man seeks God for the satisfaction of his spiritual hunger and thirst.

This book contains much that is good and true. For instance,

that God's love is not dependent on the worthiness of its objects is a truth deserving of the strongest emphasis. The positing of the antithesis of pagan and Christian love as belonging originally to "two entirely separate spiritual worlds, between which no direct communication is possible" (p. 31) is likewise highly commendable. And yet the book is vitiated by a most serious fault. It is speculative rather than Scriptural. Its main thrust is not Biblically oriented. At crucial points it goes contrary to the Word of God. That appears not merely in Nygren's ignoring of the plain fact that Luke 6:32 ascribes *Agape* to the unregenerate (see p. 97), but especially in some of his most emphatic declarations, a few of which will be cited.

A wedge is driven between the Old Testament and the New when it is said: "If the Commandment of Love can be said to be specifically Christian, as undoubtedly it can, the reason is to be found, not in the commandment as such, but in the quite new meaning that Christianity has given it. The love it requires does not mean the same in a Christian context as it meant in Judaism" (p. 62). The same may be said of the sentence: "Nietzsche quite rightly saw that Christian love means the transvaluation of those values of antiquity which he himself valued most highly; but he did not see that it means just as complete a transvaluation of all Jewish values" (p. 65). Christianity is said to have emerged from the religion of ancient Israel as "a completely new religion" (p. 68). The query cannot be suppressed what, then, becomes of Augustine's famous aphorism that the New Testament is latent in the Old and the Old patent in the New, and of the fact that the Old Testament is to the New what the bud is to the flower. In fine, the unity of Scripture, as well as the unity of the church of the old and new dispensations, is thus denied.

By adopting Bultmann's interpretation of the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:39), Nygren becomes guilty of obvious and serious perversion of Scripture. Bultmann is quoted as having said that in this command self-love is presupposed, but only "as the attitude of the natural man, which has simply to be overcome." And Nygren comments: "Self-love is man's natural condition, and also the reason for the perversity of his will. . . . So far is neighbourly love from including self-love that it actually excludes and overcomes it" (p. 101).

The basic tenet of Nygren's book is that God is *Agape;* that

is, selfless love; and that, therefore, to say that God loves Himself and does all that He does, His loving of sinners included, for His own glory is utterly erroneous (e.g., pp. xiv, 740). Yet precisely that is declared emphatically in God's self-revelation. Romans 9:23 tells us that God's purpose in election was "that he might make known the riches of his glory." In I Corinthians 1:30, 31 Paul tells believers that God has provided salvation for them in and through Christ in order that he that glories may glory, not in himself, but in God. Here Calvin comments: "Mark the end that God has in view in bestowing all things upon us in Christ — that we may not claim any merit to ourselves, but may give him all the praise." And according to Hebrews 12:2, He who could say: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9) endured the cross "for the joy that was set before him."

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Are there signs that we of the Christian Reformed Church are weakening doctrinally? In answer to that question a few facts will be briefly stated.

Attention was called to a dearth of doctrinal discernment among us. It may be, and likely is, one consequence of our isolation and hence is not a new development. We have not kept ourselves well informed concerning errors prevalent round about us. But it may also betray a current dearth of interest in doctrine and a lack of zeal for the truth.

That our people manifest less interest in doctrine than they did three or four decades ago is evident. At that time not only our ministers, but many of our elders as well, were wont to study the works of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and other Calvinistic theologians. I knew an elder who spoke of Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation* — which, by the way, is not light reading — as his favorite book. Many even of our laity feasted on Kuyper's practical works. In my early teens I read to my mother, not only *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* but also parts of Brakel's *Redelijke Godsdienst.* Some of us can recall the days of the *infra-supra* controversy. My brothers and I, seated behind the base-burner in the living room of the Second Roseland parsonage, attended eagerly to many a ministerial debate on that theme. Almost every church member was interested. Today the mention of that issue elicits only quizzical smiles. It is becoming increas-

ingly difficult to get our men out for an evening of Bible study. One of us disputes the belief, held by Calvinists generally, that God's eternal counsel of foreordination determined with unalterable certainty all that was to occur in time, and few of us take notice.

From certain viewpoints our centennial celebration was a success. The centennial committee worked hard to make it that. And yet, it cannot be said that our people generally waxed truly enthusiastic. What may have been the reason? One reason undoubtedly was that the doctrinal issues which gave rise to the founding of the Christian Reformed Church in 1857 received too little emphasis and that, when they were brought to the fore, that was usually done somewhat apologetically. To be sure, the founding fathers were given credit for having the courage of their convictions, but whether their convictions were sound — that, it was intimated, was something else again. Our leaders generally left us with the impression that the question is debatable whether the Christian Reformed Church came into existence primarily because of weighty doctrinal considerations or because of factors of minor importance. In brief, the church was left with the uneasy feeling that maybe it would have been better if it had not been born or, to say the least, that its birth may have been illegitimate.

With notable exceptions, the book reviews appearing in our periodicals are, from a doctrinal viewpoint, shallow. It is not unusual for the reviewer to say in effect that the volume concerned contains much that is commendable, although exception must be taken to a few details. Obviously, that can be said of any reasonably good book. To be worth anything at all, a book review must take into account the basic philosophy or theology of the author and must point out that this philosophy or theology makes his book essentially good or bad. Let me add that, if we wish to keep our people Reformed, as presumably we do, it is important that our book reviews be written by Calvinists, not by Arminians, and most certainly not by modernists.

It is rather generally assumed that practically all our communicant members are confirmed Calvinists. Did they not receive catechetical instruction in our churches? Have they not for years listened to catechismal preaching? Are not most of them products of our Christian schools? Let us face the actual

situation squarely. In spite of the instruction they have received, many of our people are sadly ignorant of the Reformed faith. Not only that. Personal observation has taught me that some incline a bit to become Baptists; some are no longer sure of double predestination; the dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible, in use at numerous Bible conferences, is attracting some; so is the Victorious Life Movement with its Keswick conventions; some are beginning to question whether a God whose nature is love will condemn any to eternal suffering in hell. I would not be misunderstood. We all are plagued by occasional doubts. When parishioners struggle with such problems as those noted above, their pastors should instruct them sympathetically. But the point I wish to make is that the doctrinal knowledge of our people is not so great, nor are their Calvinistic convictions so strong, that the continuance of the Christian Reformed Church as a truly Reformed church may be taken for granted. That is by no means a foregone conclusion.

The saying that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life is by now so exceedingly trite that one would expect it to be discarded. And yet, strikingly similar sentiments are sometimes expressed in Christian Reformed circles, and, of all places, in the chapels of Calvin College and Seminary. The students are told in effect by their fellow students and others that doctrine is of little account, that what really counts is the Christian life. And since love is the fulfillment of the law, love is extolled at the expense of truth. Now the Christian life is most certainly a life of love, and its necessity can hardly be overemphasized; but to belittle truth in the interest of love is folly. To stress life to the detriment of doctrine is no less foolish than to stress doctrine to the detriment of life. The latter spells orthodoxism; the former, moralism. Both corrupt Christianity. And never to be forgotten, he who disparages doctrine undermines not only truth, but goodness also, for one's beliefs determine one's conduct. Does not Scripture tell us that God gave the heathen up unto "vile affections" because they "changed the truth of God into a lie" (Rom. 1:25, 26)? And did not Jesus say: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)? He had in mind freedom from sin. We shall do well to remember, too, that depreciation of truth leads inevitably to rejection of truth. There is but a step between indifference to doctrine and theological liberalism.

The Church and Its Traditions

IV

THE CHURCH AND ITS TRADITIONS

A tradition may be defined as a belief or custom handed down from the past. Every nation has its traditions. So does every social group. And so does every church. Inasmuch as churches are concerned with religion, the most important and most comprehensive aspect of life, they tend to be conservative. Hence churches have a way of holding rather tenaciously to their traditions. Even those churches which pride themselves on their progressiveness and liberalism cling to certain established practices. For instance, almost without exception they have a worship service on Sunday mornings and in that service the minister delivers a discourse related somewhat and somehow to the Bible.

Not all church traditions are equally valid. They may be divided into three groups. Some of them are based directly on the Word of God and are required by it. Others are consonant with Scripture, in no way go contrary to it, but cannot be said to be demanded by it. Still others violate Holy Writ. Presumably, it will prove profitable to consider the traditions of the Christian Reformed Church under those heads.

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The term *tradition* occurs in the Bible in various senses. Sometimes it refers to beliefs and practices of human invention, at other times to God-established beliefs and practices. Frequently it is used in an unfavorable sense. Jesus roundly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees of His day for making the law of God of none effect by their traditions (Matt. 15:6). Occasionally it is employed in a highly favorable sense. Paul admonished the Christians at Thessalonica: "Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (II Thess. 2:15); and he commanded them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Withdraw yourselves from every brother

that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (II Thess. 3:6).

The Christian Reformed Church, and for that matter any truly Christian church, has an exceedingly large body of traditions of the latter kind. They are contained in the Bible. Obviously, not every precept and prescription in the Bible was intended for all times and places. The ceremonial law regulated the worship of God's people of the old dispensation but was abrogated at Christ's death, when the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom. Also the so-called civil law contained in the books of Moses, while enunciating many principles of justice valid everywhere and always, was intended primarily for the Israelitish people and is not binding in detail on other nations. A few apostolic admonitions, too, have reference to customs peculiar to the apostolic age. For example, Paul's insistence that women have their heads covered in public worship was related to the social proprieties of the time (I Cor. 11:2-16) and can be properly understood and applied only in that light. However, it is not difficult to distinguish between such commands and those Scriptural precepts which, like the moral law, commonly called the law of the ten commandments, have perpetual and universal validity. They, together with the doctrines of Holy Scripture, constitute a body of God-prescribed traditions to which any and every Christian church is in sacred duty bound to adhere. That is meant by the assertion that the Bible is an infallible rule for faith and conduct.

By the grace of God the Christian Reformed Church is a Bible-believing church. That can be said also of several other churches. To be sure, not all such denominations hold to the same interpretation of Scripture at every point, but all of them alike strive sincerely and earnestly to abide by the doctrines and commands of the Word of God. In consequence, their traditions are to a considerable extent similar. On the other hand, those churches — and there are many of them — which do not esteem the Bible as God's infallible Word have in principle broken with those traditions and, unless they repent, are sure to depart farther and farther from them.

Some Bible-believing churches have no creeds. They stress the individual's right of private interpretation of Holy Writ to the neglect of the church's interpretation. Others, among them

the Christian Reformed Church, while upholding the right of private interpretation, are convinced that the Spirit of truth was given, not merely to each believer, but specifically to the body of believers known as the church. Therefore they have deemed it prudent to record their interpretation of Scripture, primarily in confessions and catechisms, and secondarily also in certain liturgical writings and forms of government. These are based so substantially on Scripture that for practical intents and purposes they may be said to be a summary of God-given traditions.

However, Protestant churches are careful not to claim the same authority for those documents as for the Bible. After all, they are fallible interpretations of the infallible Word. That makes it a matter of great importance for a church to keep its written standards just as Scriptural as is possible. To that end they may have to be altered from time to time. As the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit receives new light on the meaning of Scripture, that ought to be done. Sometimes it is done. For one significant example, the Reformed churches today have a deeper and clearer insight into the teaching of Scripture on the relation of church and state than did those churches in the Reformation age. For that reason the Christian Reformed Church has seen fit to amend Article XXXVI of the *Belgic Confession,* which deals with that matter. It must be admitted, however, that most churches are loath to amend their standards. Conservative churches tend to regard their creeds as sacrosanct. If that tendency were wholly foreign to the Christian Reformed Church, we might well be more ready than we appear to be to give serious consideration to the question, for one example, whether we can abide by the statement in Article XXXV of the *Belgic Confession* that "we err not when we say that what is eaten and drunk by us [in the Lord's Supper] is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ." A few years ago a member of the faculty of Calvin College placed that question before the church, and he deserves credit for insisting on an answer.

There is another reason why a church's confessions should, at least in part, be reformulated from time to time. Most of them were drawn up in opposition to errors that were prevalent a few centuries ago. It does not follow that they are now outdated, for theological errors have a way of repeating themselves. Yet

they should be augmented at times so as to take into account current departures from the faith.

Only if a church's standards are constantly improved as to both Scripturalness and contemporary relevance will they continue as a body of living traditions. Otherwise they are sure to degenerate little by little into mere museum pieces — interesting, but in no way normative, records of the beliefs and practices of past generations. That has occurred in some erstwhile orthodox churches. May it not happen to the Christian Reformed Church.

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Every church has in the course of its history acquired a considerable number of traditions that are consonant with the Word of God but are not required by the Word.

With reference to such traditions two extreme positions must be avoided. On the one hand, there is the danger that especially the young, who often have a way of belittling the old and glorifying the new, will disparage, and even ridicule, them. That is not the part of wisdom. Traditions of this kind have stood the test of time and in many instances proved their worth. To discard them lightly is the equivalent of flippantly brushing aside the lessons of history. On the other hand, older folk, who generally speaking are more conservative, are in danger of failing to distinguish between such traditions and those prescribed by the Word of God. That attitude, too, is far from wholesome. To equate custom with law is a common but serious error. It amounts to a strictness that goes beyond Scripture. In effect, although not intentionally, it would add to the Bible.

It would not be difficult to draw up a long list of such traditions, prevalent in the Christian Reformed Church. To name a few, it is customary in our churches to read the law of the ten commandments, together with its Scriptural summary, in the Sunday morning service of worship, to have our ministers "explain . . . the sum of Christian Doctrine comprehended in the *Heidelberg Catechism*" in one of their sermons practically every Sunday, to hold a "preparatory service" one week in advance of the celebration of holy communion, to read ecclesiastically prescribed forms in connection with the administration of the sacraments and on certain other occasions, and to observe such

Christian festivals as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost. There might be added the custom — which is hardly ecclesiastical — of our people to pray after, as well as before, meals and to read a portion of Scripture in connection with most of their meals.

I have a lecture bearing the title "Landmarks and Sandmarks." By "landmarks" I mean God-prescribed traditions, by "sandmarks" man-made traditions. One point of that lecture is that only the former bind the conscience. Another point is that the latter, although never to be equated with the former, may be so good that to discard them would constitute a distinct loss. Experience has taught me that this is a delicate subject. Whenever I have dealt with it, I have felt myself to be, so to speak, between Scylla and Charybdis; that is, in modern parlance, between two fires. Objections came from two directions. There were those who were critical of my upholding the custom of regular catechismal preaching; others found fault with me for saying that I have as high regard for those of my Christian friends who say grace only before meals as for those who pray both before and after. Both types of comment have convinced me that our people have need of a balanced presentation of this matter.

Although I am more zealous for some of the traditions listed above than for others, with not one of them would I care to dispense. But what right have I to assert that the law of God demands their retention? And what right have I to force them upon others? Certainly, I may recommend them to others. I do. A Latin professor at the University of Chicago once told a class of which I was a member that during a visit to England he had lodged with an elderly couple who had "the beautiful custom" — those were his words — of reading a portion of Scripture at every meal. In describing that custom I would use an even stronger adjective than "beautiful." But I have no right to tell my neighbor that he is transgressing God's law if he does not comply with it. He may prefer to read his Bible at other times.

The Protestant Reformers, by and large, were opposed to the celebration of the so-called Christian festivals. I feel that, in their reaction from Romish practice, they took an extreme position. But a very good friend of mine is firmly convinced that they

were right. Far be it from me to say that he sins when he fails to go to church on Christmas Day.

For a few years now the Christian Reformed Church has been moving in the direction of closer fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Committees of the two denominations have had conversations with each other and have even arrived at a few preliminary conclusions. Possibly organic union will be considered in the relatively near future. If and when that comes to pass, it would be a pity if man-made traditions should prevent a merger. Yet that possibility is very real. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church does not at present have a rule concerning catechismal preaching. Would it be willing to adopt an equivalent of the Christian Reformed custom in that regard? We have *prescribed* forms for the administration of the sacraments as well as for certain other functions. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has only *recommended* forms. That difference is easily explained from history. British Calvinists have had to contend with formalism in the Church of England. That helps to account for their aversion to prescribed forms. And the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is in the British tradition. Dutch Calvinists, on the other hand, have had to contend at first hand with Arminianism. During the Remonstrant controversy in Holland it was not unusual for Arminian ministers to insert their errors into the forms employed in worship. Therefore the Reformed churches of The Netherlands thought it wise to require the use of ecclesiastically approved forms. And the Christian Reformed Church is in that tradition. In the Christian Reformed Church synodical decisions are as binding as the articles of the *Church Order;* the Orthodox Presbyterian Church regards the decisions of a general assembly as less binding than the provisions of the *Form of Government.* Will such differences of tradition keep these two churches apart? That would be regrettable. Or shall we say that it would be sin?

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The Pharisees of Jesus' day observed many traditions that violated the Word of God. The Roman Catholic Church does likewise. The infallibility of the pope in his official pronouncements on matters of faith and morals, the meritoriousness of good works, the cleansing of believers in purgatory, the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary — and now also her assump-

tion — are a few traditional beliefs of Rome that contradict Scripture. Some of its practices that fall in the same category are the veneration of saints, particularly of the mother of Jesus, the worship of the Eucharistic host, and the offering of prayers for the dead.

To such Romish traditions the Reformers objected strenuously, and that became an important factor in the Protestant Reformation. Consequently, Protestant churches generally have few anti-Scriptural traditions. However, to say that they have none would be to give them too much credit. In course of time they, too, have acquired such traditions. The Christian Reformed Church, I fear, is no exception. My remarks at this point will be suggestive rather than assertive.

Archbishop Ussher, 1581-1656, on the basis of certain Old Testament genealogies came to the conclusion that the creation of the heavens and the earth occurred in the year 4004 B.C. There are Bibles in which that date is printed in the margin alongside Genesis 1:1. If that is correct, the earth today is less than six thousand years old. Even apart from the teaching of science, that of geology and chemistry in particular, concerning the age of the earth, practically all believing students of Scripture are now convinced that Ussher made some serious miscalculations. They have come to the conclusion that God did not intend to reveal in Scripture the age of this planet. Fifty years ago many of our Christian Reformed people held to the Ussher tradition. Have all of us discarded it by now?

When I was a boy, it was rather generally supposed in Christian Reformed circles that, as to being Reformed, he who was of Dutch ancestry and could use the Dutch language had a distinct advantage over others. Perhaps that notion was not wholly nonsensical. Calvinism has flourished in The Netherlands as in few, if indeed any, other lands, and a veritable flood of Calvinistic literature has issued from Holland. Benjamin B. Warfield of Princeton Seminary used to say — facetiously, of course, though not wholly so — that, if he were to be born a second time, he would want to be born a Dutchman. It is generally known, however, that not even John Calvin, who certainly was a Calvinist if ever there was one, had any such privilege. He was born of French parentage. Today we smile at the nationalistic prejudices of our grandparents. We have come to see

clearly that Calvinism partakes of the universalism of Christianity. Or have we?

We have, together with almost all Christians, acquired a way of distinguishing between great sins and small ones. That is perilous procedure. Granted that some sins are more heinous than are others, every sin is heinous in the sight of the holy God. And what right have we to stress some of the ten commandments less than others? It has come about that we condemn coveting less severely than evil speaking, slander less severely than theft, and certain forms of stealing — from the government, for instance — hardly at all. In a word, we are in great danger of substituting our *mores* for the moral law of God.

The average age at which our young people make public profession of their faith is about eighteen. Such is our custom. But can it stand the test of Scripture? In Israel it was customary for children at the age of twelve to accompany their parents to the great feasts in the temple at Jerusalem, and on that tradition Jesus, by doing likewise, put the stamp of approval. It is clear that children of twelve were regarded as having come to years of discretion. The most liberal allowance for the fact that young people in the Orient usually arrive at maturity sooner than do young people in the Occident will not suffice to fill the gap between twelve and eighteen. The membership of the Christian church consists of believers and their children. As soon as one is no longer a child he must in active faith enter upon the privileges and responsibilities of communicant membership. True, there are churches which "confirm" almost automatically all their children when they are still quite immature. That practice must be condemned. But do we not err in the opposite direction?

In most of our churches parents are given one opportunity a month to present their children for holy baptism. The validity of that custom may be called into question without insisting that a child of the covenant must needs be baptized on the very first Sabbath after its birth. Ought not believers to have the privilege to present their little ones for baptism in any gathering of the church for worship?

Not only must a church discard beliefs and practices which go contrary to Scripture; it must also avoid the acquisition of such traditions. Therefore we do better not to designate the place of worship as "sanctuary," for the church of the new dis-

pensation, in distinction from that of the old, has no holy places. Nor should we, after the manner of Roman Catholicism, describe the week before Easter as "holy week," for the New Testament recognizes as a holy time only the God-ordained Sabbath. For the same reason we should distinguish more sharply than we sometimes do between "God's plan" for our lives and His law. God's plan has reference to His decretive will; God's law is His preceptive will. God's plan includes every event in our lives, sin included; God's law forbids sin and demands that we serve God to the utmost of our ability. We cannot thwart God's plan, but we often break His law. And shall we not stop speaking of ministers, missionaries, and a few others as being engaged in "full-time Christian service"? The butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker, too, ought to be engaged in such service. If they live as Christians should, doing all to the glory of God, they are.

In this connection reference must be made to a subject which is definitely controversial among us. It has long been the official position of the Christian Reformed Church that a person who was divorced on unbiblical grounds and has remarried is, so long as his or her former spouse is alive, continuing in adultery and therefore cannot be a member of the church. The 1956 Synod, however, took the position that such a person, although he or she committed adultery at the time of remarriage, cannot be said to be living in continuous adultery and may, on giving convincing evidence of repentance, be received into the membership of the church. I am not now asserting dogmatically that one or the other of those positions is Scriptural. Frankly, I am not sure that we have the problem solved. But I am concerned to make a comment which is pertinent in the present context. The objection has been raised that the Synod of 1956 violated Article 31 of the *Church Order*, which stipulates that a decision of a major assembly "shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the Articles of the Church Order." Synod is said to have erred in setting aside a historic position of the church without presenting proof that that position was in conflict with Scripture. Now that criticism is not fair. Whether rightly or wrongly, Synod became convinced that the traditional position finds no support in Scripture. And it is a Scriptural

principle that the church may not add to the law of God and may place no burdens upon men which the Word of God does not place upon them. On the assumption, then, that the traditional position of the church goes beyond Scripture, Synod was on Scriptural ground in voiding it. It follows that the only course now open to those who deem the traditional position Scriptural is to strive to convince the church that such is the case.

Before dismissing this aspect of our subject, let me make a suggestion that may possibly shock a reader or two, although there is no good reason why it should. It is a firmly established Christian Reformed tradition that adultery or fornication is the one and only Biblical ground for divorce. However, John Calvin, the Puritan Westminster divines, and Gijsbertus Voetius, the great Dutch authority on church government, were of the opinion that I Corinthians 7:15 speaks of a second ground. I am not saying that the Christian Reformed Church is wrong in its present stand. I am suggesting that there is need of a more thorough study than we have made heretofore of the question whether wilful desertion of a believer by an unbelieving spouse for reasons of religion does not constitute a second Biblical ground for divorce.

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All that has been said on "The Church and Its Traditions" may be summed up in one sentence: *Let us be content to live by Holy Scripture as the one and only infallible rule for faith and conduct, neither subtracting from it nor adding to it.*

The Church and the Covenant

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THE CHURCH AND THE COVENANT

When mention is made in Christian Reformed circles of the covenant of grace, the reference is almost invariably to the children of believers. That such children are included in the covenant is a most important fact, but it is by no means the whole of the doctrine of the covenant. That doctrine has a much broader relevance.

In the next chapter it will be pointed out that Scripture relates the covenant in a most direct way to evangelism. At this point it must be said that the covenant has an emphatic bearing on the Reformed theology as a whole. It makes for a well-balanced or full-orbed theology. Although it is not at all my intention to make this volume an abbreviated course in Reformed doctrine, it may prove helpful to name some specific instances of the truth just stated.

In 1884 Abraham Kuyper published a series of popular Bible studies under the title, *Grace Is Particular*. It hardly needs to be said that under that head he dealt with the five points of Calvinism. Already in the following year he published a series of Bible studies with the title, *The Doctrine of the Covenants*. He began the second volume by saying in effect that it was intended to complement the first. Without retracting, or in the least modifying, anything he had written in the first volume, he now stressed certain complementary teachings of Scripture. Following are a few examples — not all of them borrowed from Kuyper — of the way in which the doctrine of the covenant complements certain distinctive Reformed emphases.

The covenant stresses the divine condescension, complementing the transcendent divine majesty. God is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy." Therefore He declares: "I dwell in the high and holy place." But He

proceeds: "With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15). To quote the *Westminster Confession of Faith:* "The distance between God and the creature is so great that, although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of *convenant*" (Chapter VII, Section I). God speaks of Himself as the friend, even the husband, of His people. He dwells with them as the Incarnate Son, in them as the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such condescension is truly amazing.

The covenant stresses God's tender mercy, complementing His absolute double predestination. From eternity God elected some of the lost human race to eternal life and, passing others by, foreordained them to eternal punishment for their sins. This double decree was sovereign. It was also unalterable. Yet that is not the entire truth. Sovereign though election was, it was not coldly arbitrary. Without being bound in His decree by family relationships, God graciously took them into account. By and large, He chose unto eternal life individuals *and their seed.* And, paradoxical as it may be, to wayward sinners, elect and non-elect alike, God gives the assurance that He has no pleasure in their death but that they turn from their evil way and live (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11). That is a covenant plea and pledge.

The covenant stresses the ethical manner of the execution of God's counsel of predestination, complementing the immutability of that counsel. Nothing is more certain than that God's counsel will stand (Isa. 46:10). But it does not follow that man has no choice in the matter. Certainty does not preclude freedom. The doctrine of the covenant emphasizes the truth that the divine counsel of predestination is executed, not by force, but by persuasion; not magically, but ethically. Man is not a stock or block which God by force lifts up to heaven or casts down to hell. On the contrary, God deals with him as a rational and moral being, a free agent. The wicked perish because they love death (Prov. 8:36) and will not come to the Saviour that they may have life (John 5:40). And the very first step in the salvation of the elect is their being made willing to be saved, which comes to pass in their regeneration. In words of A. A. Hodge: "Since God in all

departments of his moral government treats man as an intelligent, voluntary, and responsible moral agent, it follows that the execution of the eternal Plan of Redemption must be in its general character ethical and not magical, must proceed by the revelation of truth, and the influences of motives, and must be voluntarily appropriated by the subject as an offered grace, and obeyed as an enjoined duty upon pain of reprobation. Hence its application must possess all the essential attributes of a *Covenant* in time between God and his people" (*Outlines of Theology,* p. 367).

The covenant stresses man's strict responsibility to God, complementing his utter dependence on God. Of the various interpretations of the Christian way of salvation the Reformed interpretation makes man completely dependent on God in the entire process. Pelagianism blatantly denies the Christian way of salvation by making man wholly independent of God. It boasts, as did William E. Henley:

> It matters not how strait the gate
> How charged with punishment the scroll;
> I am the master of my fate,
> I am the captain of my soul.

Semi-Pelagianism makes God dependent on man at the very outset. Man, it insists, must and can initiate the process of salvation, although he cannot complete it without divine aid. Arminianism and some versions of Lutheranism hold that, while God must commence the process of salvation, He cannot complete it without the sinner's consent. Calvinism makes the sinner dependent on God from beginning to end, God dependent on the sinner at no point at all. For that reason it ascribes to God all the glory for man's salvation. Let no one conclude that human responsibility is thus ruled out. Although no man can come in faith to Christ except the Father draw him (John 6:44), the sinner is commanded to believe (Acts 16:31). Precisely because it is God who keeps working in him both to will and to do, the believer must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12, 13). And, impossible though it is for the Christian to attain perfection in this life, he is enjoined to be perfect even as God is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Human responsibility looms exceedingly large in the covenant. It demands that man believe and obey. To be sure, it also teaches that those obligations are met by the grace of God alone, but that truth

does not detract one whit from man's accountability for unbelief and disobedience. In brief, if man is saved, God gets all the glory; if man is lost, man gets all the blame.

At this point a prevalent misrepresentation, previously mentioned, must be refuted. Often it is said that the Calvinist emphasizes divine sovereignty, the Arminian human responsibility. That is a half-truth, and a most misleading one. The Calvinist does indeed stress divine sovereignty, but he stresses human responsibility no less. That might reasonably be expected, for human responsibility is a corollary of divine sovereignty. Man is responsible to God for the very reason, and for the sole reason, that God is sovereign. And the truth of the matter is that, instead of being less insistent on human responsibility than is the Arminian, the Calvinist is more so. Arminianism teaches that one's obligation is limited by one's ability, that God never requires of man what he cannot do, that God adjusts His demands to the enfeebled powers of man, and that God is satisfied with so-called evangelical obedience, which is something less than complete obedience to the divine law. Calvinism teaches that God insists on perfect obedience, however far such obedience may, and actually does, transcend human ability.

It has been intimated that the doctrine of the covenant of grace is an afterthought of the Reformed theology. It has even been suggested that the Reformed faith is indebted for that afterthought to Arminianism, and that the emphases of that doctrine as delineated above constitute a compromise with Arminianism. Nothing could be farther removed from the truth. No one will dare to charge the *Canons of Dort* with compromising. They are a careful, yet unequivocal and bold, statement of the five points of Calvinism. But they are also a strong statement of the doctrine of the covenant. Repeatedly they name the covenant of grace. They teach reprobation, to be sure, but also God's sincere offer of salvation to all whom the gospel reaches. And their epilogue or conclusion, which the 1958 Synod wisely decided to publish in the revised edition of the *Psalter Hymnal*, although not specifically naming the covenant of grace, strongly stresses its implications. The doctrine of the covenant is of the essence of the Reformed faith. The Reformed theology is covenant theology.

Inasmuch as few of our people have any knowledge of the

aforenamed epilogue, I here in part reproduce it. The Synod of Dort vigorously spurned the following perversions, among others, of the five points of Calvinism: "That the doctrine of the Reformed churches concerning predestination, and the points annexed to it, by its own genius and necessary tendency, leads off the minds of men from all piety and religion; that it is an opiate administered by the flesh and the devil, and the stronghold of Satan, where he lies in wait for all; and from which he wounds multitudes, and mortally strikes through many with the darts both of despair and security; that it makes God the author of sin, unjust, tyrannical, hypocritical; that it is nothing more than interpolated Stoicism, Manicheism, Libertinism, Turcism; that it renders men carnally secure, since they are persuaded by it that nothing can hinder the salvation of the elect, let them live as they please; and therefore, that they may safely perpetrate every species of the most atrocious crimes; and that, if the reprobate should even perform truly all the works of the saints, their obedience would not in the least contribute to their salvation; that the same doctrine teaches, that God, by a mere arbitrary act of his will, without the least respect or view to any sin, has predestinated the greatest part of the world to eternal damnation; and has created them for this very purpose; that in the same manner in which the election is the fountain and the cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety; that many children of the faithful are torn, guiltless, from their mothers' breasts, and tyrannically plunged into hell; so that, neither baptism, nor the prayers of the Church at their baptism, can at all profit by them." Let no one think that this statement detracted an iota from the five points of Calvinism as formulated at Dort. It did nothing of the kind. What it did was to uphold them against misrepresentation. And it did that by relating them to the covenant of grace.

The Calvinist gets both his doctrine of particular sovereign grace and his doctrine of the covenant of grace from the Word of God. And, difficult, at some points impossible, though he may find it to square the two with each other before the bar of human reason, he accepts both unreservedly for the simple reason that both are taught unmistakably in the Word of God. The glory of Calvinism is its Scripturalness. The Calvinist accepts *all* that is taught in Holy Writ and he includes it *all* in

his system of doctrine, regardless of the seeming inconsistencies that may result. He bows humbly and unreservedly before the paradoxes of the Word of God. And he does that freely and boldly because he knows that God cannot contradict Himself. In short, he willingly subjects human logic to the divine *logos*.

May the Christian Reformed Church ever accept and proclaim both the doctrine of sovereign particular grace and that of the covenant of grace in all their Scriptural fullness. Only then will it escape theological unbalance. Only then will its theology be full-orbed. Only then will it avoid barren rationalism. Only then will its theology be truly Scriptural. And only then will it continue Reformed.

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That the children of believers are included in the covenant of grace is taught unmistakably in Scripture. When God established the covenant with Abraham, the father of the faithful, He said: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7); and the apostle Paul can hardly have had less in mind when he described the children of even a mixed marriage as "holy" (I Cor. 7:14).

By the grace of God the Christian Reformed Church upholds that Scriptural truth as few churches do. Not only is it denied by Baptist and kindred churches; it is ignored by many churches with Reformed standards. More than a few churches which practice infant baptism, having divorced that rite from the covenant, consider it a mere dedicatory or, still worse, a mere christening ceremony. Consequently they do not count baptized children as church members. The Christian Reformed Church bases the sacrament of infant baptism squarely on the covenant of grace. It baptizes the children of believers, not in order to bring them into the covenant, but because they are in the covenant. It counts them as members, *full* members – although not communicant members – of the visible church. As the child of American parents is a full citizen of these United States even before it has attained majority, so the child of believers is a full member of Christ's church. By baptism it is acknowledged as such. And, fully aware that God is wont to continue His covenant from generation to generation, not auto-

matically or magically, but by the means of Christian education, the Christian Reformed Church requires of parents that they do their utmost to rear their children in the fear and nurture of the Lord, strongly advocates the establishment of, and generously lends its support for the maintenance of, parent-controlled Christian day schools, itself diligently instructs its children in the doctrines of Holy Scripture, and demands of those children, as they come to years of discretion, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and allegiance to Him as Lord.

In the interest of historical accuracy it must here be confessed that there was a time when the Christian day school met with considerable opposition in Christian Reformed circles. That was the case when my father, Klaas Kuiper, pleaded that cause at the turn of the century. Even now not all of us are truly enthusiastic on this score. Yet the progress that has been made is reason for deep gratitude to God.

At this point the distinctiveness of the Christian Reformed Church stands out with great clarity and its glory shines forth with great brilliance. Well may we thank God on our knees for keeping us faithful in upholding, both in theory and in practice, the doctrine of the covenant of grace throughout the first century of our existence as a denomination. This is itself a striking manifestation of God's covenant faithfulness. In His faithfulness He has kept us faithful.

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To say that we have been completely faithful would be sinful boasting. The peril of unfaithfulness has ever been with us, and is today. Leanings toward unfaithfulness have from time to time appeared among us, and still do. Actual unfaithfulness is found with us. Therefore a bit of instruction and a few warnings are hardly out of place.

On certain aspects of the position of the children of believers in the covenant of grace there has long been a difference of opinion within the Reformed community. Within the Christian Reformed Church, too, there has never been complete unanimity on that score. In consequence, some of our members are confused, not to say disturbed. They should be told that with reference to this doctrine — as indeed with reference to every doctrine — the most learned theologians know only in part, that the Reformed system of doctrine is not so rigid as to allow for

no difference of opinion whatever, and that on disputed points the Reformed churches are constantly seeking more light not only, but are gradually acquiring more certitude. In consequence, although we do not have all the answers, we do have more answers than we had a hundred, or even fifty, years ago. Some specific instances may be cited.

Whatever views may have been held in another era on the subject of "baptismal regeneration," it is now clear to Reformed theologians generally that the sacrament of baptism does not convey the new birth and that the Holy Spirit is free to bestow the grace of regeneration on God's elect before baptism, at the time of baptism, or at any time before their death.

There was a time when influential theologians in the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands taught that baptism is to be administered to children of the covenant on the ground of their presumptive regeneration. In 1905 the Synod of Utrecht took the official position that, although in the judgment of charity the children of believers are to be regarded as having been born again until it appears, as they grow up, that such is not the case, the ground of baptism is another; namely, the objective fact of their being in the covenant. The Christian Reformed Synod of 1908 concurred in that decision.

To the present day there is a difference of opinion among Calvinists as to the presumptive regeneration of the children of believers. That difference was prominent among the issues which occasioned a split in the Reformed Churches of Holland not many years ago. To me it seems clear that the difference is one of little more than emphasis. On the one hand, everybody will grant that many children of the covenant are regenerated in babyhood. For instance, those who die in infancy cannot be saved unless they are previously born again. On the other hand, everybody will admit that not all children of believing parents are regenerated in childhood or, for that matter, will be subsequently.

Time was when a number of Reformed theologians insisted that only the elect are in the covenant of grace. Today the sober judgment prevails that all children of believers are in the covenant in one sense or another. The distinction between the covenant as a legal relationship and the covenant as a vital relationship has proved helpful. In the former sense all children

of believers are in the covenant. The Scriptural teaching that some become covenant-breakers (e.g., Jer. 31:32) points clearly in that direction. He who is in no sense within the covenant can hardly break it. However, only the regenerate are in the covenant in a vital sense, and it is a foregone conclusion that only the elect will be regenerated.

Even on the perennially disputed matter of the baptism of children born outside the covenant but adopted by believers, there is among us, it seems to me, a trend toward unanimity. True, some of my best friends and colleagues keep denying the propriety of such baptism, and I respect them no less for it. But in view of the current emphasis on the legal aspect of the covenant, I have my doubts whether that position can long be maintained.

Sad to say, not all of our Christian Reformed people dare to take the definite position that all believers' children who die in infancy are saved. There is something strange about that. Such outstanding American Calvinists as Charles Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield, and R. A. Webb asserted unhesitatingly that all children — even those of *pagans* — who die in infancy are saved. Some of us do not dare to say that all *believers'* children who die in infancy are saved. Those positions are exceedingly far apart. Likely, the aforenamed theologians were overly bold; certainly, we are too timid. Back of this timidity possibly lurks the erroneous notion that God has included only His elect in the covenant, together with the perfectly correct observation that we have no way of telling *a priori* whether a given child of Christian parents is numbered among the elect. The fact is that every child of believing parents is included in the covenant. Every such child has the promise that God will be its God. The child which dies in infancy obviously has not rejected that promise by unbelief. The promise stands. That objective ground makes its salvation certain. And now the deductions are warranted that it was regenerated before its departure from this life and was chosen by God in Christ from the foundation of the world. Therefore the fathers of Dort could assert: "Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleases God

to call out of this life in their infancy" *(Canons of Dort,* First Head of Doctrine, Article 17).

We of the Christian Reformed Church are in danger of going to one or the other of two extremes.

On the one hand is the peril of present-day dispensationalism, which is taught in the Scofield Bible and is prevalent among American fundamentalists. One of its strongest emphases is the denial of the unity and continuity of the covenant of grace in what we of the Reformed faith are wont to call the old and new dispensations. By that denial it destroys the ground of infant baptism as the God-ordained substitute for the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision. It is no accident that a great many dispensationalists are Baptists and that those who are not, tend to become Baptists. Some forty years ago a Christian Reformed minister turned dispensationalist. Not infrequently one of our members parts company with us to become affiliated with a Baptist church. The admonition is hardly superfluous that we who think we stand take heed lest we fall into the same error.

On the other hand is the peril that we will take it for granted that our children are on the way to heaven. We need to be reminded that one implication of presumptive regeneration is that not all baptized children are actually regenerated. If all without exception were, we would not speak of *presumptive* regeneration. It follows that a given child of the covenant may stand in need of the new birth. We also must be told that even those of our children who have been born again need to be converted. And may we not forget that also a so-called evangelical conversion entails a conviction of sin. In short, there is but one way of salvation. Covenant children, like all others, must learn to know their sinfulness and must cast themselves as hell-deserving and helpless sinners upon the Christ crucified. They, too, must cry from the heart:

> Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to Thy cross I cling;
> Naked, come to Thee for dress;
> Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
> Foul, I to the fountain fly.
> Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

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I want to conclude this chapter on a note of cheer.

After a ministry of fourteen years in three Christian Reformed churches of Grand Rapids my lot was cast in other than Christian Reformed surroundings. Then, after some twenty years, I returned to the place which is known, somewhat facetiously, as the Jerusalem of the Christian Reformed Church. I renewed many old acquaintances. In doing so, I was struck by a most encouraging phenomenon. A great many whom I had taught as children and young people are now leaders in their several congregations. And I must confess with shame that more than a few of these I had regarded as not at all promising. Let me add that before our marriage my wife taught for some eight years in Grand Rapids Christian schools. As I now from time to time conduct Sunday services in churches of that area, she usually accompanies me, and frequently she is approached by former pupils — some of them once upon a time a bit unruly — who express a deep appreciation of their early training. In consequence I have become convinced more firmly than ever of the meaningfulness of the covenant of grace, of the fruitfulness of Christian education, of the effectualness of the prayers of Christian parents for their children, and, above all else, of the faithfulness of the covenant God.

The Christian Reformed Church has no more valuable asset than a throng of God-fearing young people. Admittedly, there are also among our youth those who talk and act like — and possibly are — covenant-breakers. These are a small minority, but often they are extremely vocal. Not infrequently they pose as leaders. May the others have the courage to be deaf to their blustering words, to condemn their foul deeds, to spurn their leadership. More power to "Youth Speaks" in *The Banner!*

At this writing it is the tenth day of June, 1958. Two days ago I gave the commencement address at the Hudsonville Christian High School. I reminded the graduates that they had received a God-centered education and urged them to lead God-centered lives. But for me that address was by no means the high point of the program. It came when a little slip of a girl delivered the valedictory. With true eloquence, cogent reasoning, and, at once, deep devotion she witnessed for God-centered living. She is, I am sure, one of a great many. I thanked God and took courage.

The Church and Evangelism

VI

THE CHURCH AND EVANGELISM

A distinction is sometimes made between *missions* and *evangelism.* The former term is used to designate the bringing of the gospel to the unsaved at some distance, the latter to designate the bringing of the gospel to the unsaved in one's immediate surroundings. Dutch Calvinists often employ the term *evangelism* in a still more specialized sense. The authors of *Handboek voor Gereformeerde Evangelisatie* refer it exclusively to those who once were, either personally or in their forebears, within the covenant of grace and the church, but have wandered away. Such restricted usages of the concept *evangelism* are a bit difficult to defend. *Evangelism* means *promulgation of the gospel.* Obviously, to bring the gospel to the people of Japan is evangelism as truly as to bring the gospel to next-door neighbors, and to bring the gospel to Mexican migrants employed on one's farm is evangelism as truly as to bring the gospel to one's unchurched neighbors who until fifteen years ago were members of the Christian Reformed Church. In a sense all preaching, also congregational preaching, is evangelism, for the gospel must be proclaimed to saints as well as sinners. In this chapter the term will be used in the sense in which it is used in *Evangelism for the World Today as Interpreted by Christian Leaders throughout the World,* a book published for the International Missionary Council in 1938 (Harper and Brothers). It contains no fewer than 122 definitions of evangelism by as many so-called Christian leaders. Sad to say, some of those definitions savor strongly of theological liberalism; but almost all have this in common that they regard evangelism as the bringing of the gospel to the unsaved anywhere.

In few respects, if indeed in any, has the Christian Reformed Church made as much progress during the first century of its existence as in evangelism. That is to say, one of the choicest blessings bestowed by God on the Christian Reformed Church in that period of its history was greatly increased evangelistic activity.

Let no one accuse the founding fathers of a lack of interest in evangelism. In *One Hundred Years in the New World,* Henry J. Evenhouse, the present Director of Missions, informs us: "A strong missionary spirit was evident in the Christian Reformed Church from the very beginning." As early as October, 1857, at the second classical meeting of the newly founded denomination, it was decided that special prayer meetings for missions should be held every first Monday of the month and that at those meetings offerings would be received for the distribution of Bibles. Only gradually, however, did actual evangelistic activity get under way. For many decades the emphasis of our home missions program was on church extension among people of Dutch descent rather than evangelism. The Synod of 1892 took steps toward the financial support of existing Jewish missions but did not establish such a mission for the denomination. I recall the sending out of Herman Fryling, our first ordained denominational missionary to the Indians of the Southwest. That was in 1896. Little did I think at the time that after twenty-six years I would, as president of the Christian Reformed Board of Missions, have the high privilege of administering Christian baptism to five young Zunis whose hearts the Lord had opened so that they gave heed to the gospel preached by that servant of God. It was not until 1920 that the Christian Reformed Church chose China as the scene of its first foreign missions enterprise. On November 23 of that year Lee S. Huizenga, John C. De Korne, and Harry S. Dykstra, together with their families, disembarked at Shanghai. At about the same time an urgent sense of need for local evangelism began to grip our churches. A booklet on that subject by William P. Van Wyk proved a powerful stimulant.

How our evangelistic activity has increased since that time! By now our sons and daughters have carried the glad tidings of salvation to men of every race in Alaska, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Ceylon, China, Formosa, India, Japan, New Zealand,

Nigeria, Pakistan, and other lands. Our evangelistic efforts on this continent embrace the Indians of New Mexico, the Negroes of Harlem, Jews, and Mexican migrants. Through active home missions and zealous environmental evangelism men and women with diverse national backgrounds are being brought into our communion. Missionary chapels are being converted into established churches. *The Banner* informs us that during the first nine months of 1958 twenty-two new missionaries either entered upon their work or were appointed to serve under our Board of Foreign Missions. Due in part to the influence of the Reformed Bible Institute, our laity is becoming increasingly active in evangelism. And by no means least, on the Back to God Hour we are broadcasting the gospel of the grace of God practically to the four corners of the earth. How evident it is that the universalism of the new dispensation, initiated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, has stirred our churches! This, too, is cause, not indeed for boasting, but for profound gratitude to God.

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May God forbid that we should become complacent about our progress in evangelism! Our zeal for evangelism is not nearly as warm as it ought to be. Our evangelistic labors are not nearly as abundant as they should be. Our prayers for the translation of souls from darkness into God's marvelous light must become far more fervent. To those ends certain truths need to be stressed.

Opponents of Calvinism have a way of pointing to distinctively Reformed doctrines which, they say, are bound to deter evangelistic effort. Two of such doctrines are those of election and the covenant of grace. Sad to say, Calvinists sometimes apply — rather misapply — those doctrines in such a way that they actually do put a damper on evangelistic zeal. Therefore the reminder is in order that as a matter of fact those doctrines present a strong incentive for evangelism.

Scripture teaches most emphatically that the elect are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that they should walk in them (Eph. 2:10), and that they were chosen in order that they might show forth the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (I Pet. 2:9). Election, then, is not merely

unto salvation but unto good works, and particularly unto evangelism. That may never be forgotten. God chose us, not merely that we might escape hell and go to heaven when we die, but that we might serve Him here and now. And what better way is there of serving Him than by the spread of His gospel?

In a most real sense election is universal. This is not to say that God has chosen every individual unto salvation, but that God has His elect in every people, nation, and tribe, and also in every age. All the elect, scattered over the globe and over all periods of human history, must be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, and the one and only means ordained by God to that end is the preaching of the gospel. It is clear that election, far from rendering evangelism superfluous, *demands* it. To express the same truth in another way, God's counsel of foreordination embraces means as well as ends. God decreed from eternity, not merely that certain persons would be saved, but that those certain persons would be saved *through the gospel.* Nothing could be clearer than that election *requires* evangelism.

When bringing the gospel to men, we are, of course, interested in results. We hope fervently, and pray no less fervently, that the Holy Spirit may so prepare the hearts of our hearers that the seed of the Word may fall into good soil and bring forth thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or even hundredfold. Have we any assurance that this will happen? The answer is that we have precisely one guarantee, and that one is fully reliable. If we had to depend on men for results, there would be none, for the natural man loves death rather than life. But there is God to reckon with. From eternity He decreed that certain persons would be saved. His counsel will stand. It is unalterably certain that every one of the elect will be gathered in. And that can only mean that the preaching of the gospel is sure to result in genuine conversions. Divine election, and it alone, guarantees results for evangelism.

God established the covenant of grace with Abraham. In doing that, He called Abraham out of heathen surroundings in order that he might become the father of God's peculiar people. Does the story end there? By no means. It has only begun. God's people was destined to bring forth the Saviour of the world. Therefore, at the very time of Abraham's calling it was said to him: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"

(Gen. 12:3). Separation never was an end in itself. From the very outset it was unto universalism. Christ is in fact "the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42; I John 4:14), and to the world He must be preached. Thus universalism becomes reality. Wherever the gospel is preached, there is the covenant of grace. Therefore Peter could say to a preponderantly Jewish audience that the promise was not only to them and their children, but also to all that were afar off, even as many as the Lord their God would call (Acts 2:39).

As was said, election guarantees results for evangelism. God's Word will not return void. It is certain to accomplish the end to which God sends it. And His primary end is the salvation of the elect. The covenant of grace offers an additional guarantee, and a most beneficent one. It makes certain that the results assured by election will continue from generation to generation, for all who embrace the gospel in faith are heirs to the promise: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7).

In the previous chapter it was said that the doctrine of the covenant of grace complements the doctrine of particular grace. An important aspect of that truth remains to be pointed out. Particular grace spells the salvation of some, not all; the covenant of grace spells the salvation of the world. The same Bible which teaches election tells us that Christ said: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32) and that He is "the propitiation . . . for the whole world" (I John 2:2, ASV). That there is no contradiction here is evident. Nowhere does Scripture teach that each and every individual will be saved. On the contrary, Scripture emphatically denies this. But it does teach another kind of universalism. The human race will be saved. Those who will enter the eternal city through its twelve gates — three on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west (Rev. 21:13) — will constitute humanity.

More could be said about election and the covenant of grace in relation to evangelism, but enough has been said to make it clear that, if Calvinists are not as zealous for evangelism as they ought to be, the difficulty lies not in their being Calvinists but in their not being Calvinistic enough. The more con-

sistently Reformed a church is, the more active will it be in evangelism.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost does not mark, as is often said, the birthday of the church of Christ. The church came into existence immediately after man's fall in the garden of Eden. But Pentecost does mark the most important turning point by far in the history of the church — the transition from nationalism to universalism. Pentecost spells universalism: a universal church, a universal gospel, a universal prophethood.

That the church of the new dispensation is a universal church, not one of us will deny. Perhaps we are more fully aware of that truth today than were our parents and grandparents some fifty years ago, but the Christian Reformed Church has upheld it throughout its history. Now a universal church presupposes the universal proclamation of the gospel. It was by the preaching of the gospel that about three thousand souls from "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) were brought into the church at Pentecost. By the spread of the gospel all nations are to be made disciples (Matt. 28:19). It follows that the New Testament church is in its very essence a *witnessing* church. Evangelism is not an activity in which a church may or may not engage. Nor is it merely a *must* for a church. It is questionable, to put the case mildly, whether a church which completely neglects evangelism is a true church of Jesus Christ.

An important aspect of the universality of the gospel seems not to be fully understood by all of us. We know, of course, that the gospel must be preached to all men everywhere. What we have not fully grasped is that in the gospel God in all sincerity offers eternal life to all and expresses the desire that all accept His offer. At times one hears the opinion expressed that the Scriptural doctrine of reprobation rules out a sincere offer of salvation by God to all to whom the gospel comes. That there is a difficulty here for our thinking, a paradox, need not be denied. Rather, it had better be admitted frankly. But that fact did not keep the fathers of Dort from confessing both the truths just named. The *Canons of Dort* teach reprobation unequivocally, but they teach just as unequivocally the sincere offer of the gospel. They assert in so many words: "As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what is accept-

able to Him; namely, that those who are called should come unto Him" (Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Article 8). That truth is the theme of Alexander C. De Jong's doctoral dissertation, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*. The Dort divines confessed the latter truth as well as the former because both are contained in the Word of God. The same Bible which tells us that there are those "which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (I Pet. 2:8) declares that the Lord is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). Interestingly, the selfsame apostle made both assertions.

At Pentecost cloven tongues as of fire sat on *each* of the disciples, and they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke other tongues (Acts 2:3, 4). The reference is to all who believed, not only to the apostles. This was that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: "It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:16-18). Pentecost spells the universal prophethood of believers. Every Christian is a prophet. Likely all of us subscribe to that truth, but, sad to say, few of us put it into practice as we should. Here we are face to face with an outstanding weakness of the Christian Reformed people. By and large, we do not witness for our Lord as we should. Whatever may account for that fact, it may not be condoned. It goes far toward explaining the feebleness of our impact on our surroundings. Christianity is said to have flourished in Korea as in no other oriental land. One reason was that each believer regarded himself an evangelist. On this score even the followers of Joseph Smith, false prophet though he was, put us to shame. Each of them ardently propagates his religion. One of our greatest needs is a vigorous exercise of the universal prophethood of believers.

Calvinism may be defined as God-centeredness. Reformed evangelism, too, is God-centered. The danger is ever present that evangelism will become man-centered. In many instances that has occurred. The salvation of souls is often regarded as the one end of evangelism. It is most certainly an end of evan-

gelism, and an important one, but it is by no means the ultimate end. For the Calvinist it is a means to a more comprehensive end — the growth of the body of Christ, the church. That again is a means to a still more comprehensive end — the coming of Christ's kingdom in every domain of life. And that is a means to the highest of all ends — the glory of God. Thus the Calvinist has the strongest of all incentives for evangelism. He engages in evangelism, not merely because he has a passion for souls, albeit he has that too, but because he passionately loves God and His Christ. Far be it from me to suggest that Christians who do not call themselves Calvinists do not love God and Christ. Obviously all Christians do. But Reformed evangelism excels in being consciously God-centered. Again we are driven to the conclusion that of all Christians the Calvinist must be most zealous for evangelism.

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By the grace of God our Christian Reformed people manifest considerable zeal for evangelism, but that zeal must grow much warmer. That having been said, a warning may be added against perversions of evangelism. Generally speaking, there is the danger that evangelistic zeal will be "not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2). But let me be more specific.

There are churches round about us, evangelical churches at that, which strongly stress evangelism but neglect almost entirely the religious education of their own children and the building up of their adult members in the faith. It would hardly be correct to say that such churches are too zealous for evangelism, but they may well be charged with neglect of their own households. They are guilty of serious unbalance and great folly. The apostle Paul had a consuming passion for evangelism. He strove with might and main to carry the gospel to places where Christ had not yet been named (Rom. 15:20). Yet he also taught that Christ had established various offices in the church "for the perfecting of the saints" (Eph. 4:12). He himself seems to have worked as hard at one of those tasks as at the other. As for the former, he is rightly known as the church's greatest missionary. In the interest of the latter he wrote his epistles, which constitute so large a part of the New Testament. Occasionally a voice is raised among us to the effect that the sole task of the church is to bring the gospel to the unsaved. How foolish! If

the Christian Reformed Church should take that position, the day would not be far off when, for lack of a strong home base, it would find itself incapable of effective evangelism. Such zeal is devoid of knowledge. It can only defeat its own aim.

History tells us that great evangelistic activity is not infrequently accompanied by a diminution of interest in Christian doctrine. Most assuredly, there is no good reason whatever why that should be the case, but the fact is that it often occurs. More than one historian has made a distinction between periods when the church was engrossed in doctrinal controversy and periods when it was actively engaged in evangelism; and those who make that distinction usually deprecate the former and extol the latter. True though it most certainly is that doctrinal debate ought not to interfere with evangelism, it is doubtful whether the Christian church would today have a true gospel to proclaim if it were not for the doctrinal controversy that has played so large a part in its history. The greatest of Christian missionaries was engaged in vigorous doctrinal controversy when he said with reference to the Judaizers of his day: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). It was precisely in the interest of evangelism that he defended the only true gospel so militantly.

Liberal theologians are willing to adjust the Christian message to the views held by the adherents of other religions, to the extent of sacrificing the most cardinal doctrines of Christianity. In *Personal Religion* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942) the late Douglas Clyde Macintosh of Yale University expressed a willingness to forego Christian supernaturalism in order not to offend the educated Japanese and Chinese, the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement so as not to offend the mystical mind of India, and the doctrine of the Trinity so as not to offend the Moslem. He went so far as to recommend a "non-Christological statement of the essential message of Christianity," as found in *A Theology for Christian Missions* by Hugh Vernon White (Willett, Clark, 1937). It hardly needs to be said that at present there is not the slightest danger that the Christian Reformed Church will make such concessions. The gospel is unavoidably an offense to the natural man. To remove the offense from the gospel is to destroy the gospel.

What is not so clear is that all of us are unwilling in our evangelistic message to set aside certain distinctively Reformed doctrines. I have in mind, for instance, the five points of Calvinism. And yet, to do that, would be a most serious blunder. Let us have done once and for all with the notion that the Reformed faith is a mere addition to the Christian faith. It is nothing of the kind. Contrariwise, it is the Christian faith in its most comprehensive, most consistent, and most pure expression. That becomes especially clear from a consideration of the so-called five points of Calvinism. They add up to salvation by the sovereign grace of God. They are nothing else than a coherent expression of that doctrine. And precisely that doctrine is the sum and substance of the Scriptural teaching of salvation. It is the high distinction of the Reformed faith that it holds uncompromisingly to that truth which lies at the very heart of God's special revelation. Shall we compromise the central message of God's Word? A truly Reformed church will proclaim the full gospel of the grace of God. That gospel alone can satisfy the sinner, in desperate need as he is of salvation but utterly impotent to save himself. And it ascribes to God all the glory for man's salvation. Shall we preach a gospel which gives less satisfaction to the sinner and less glory to God? And is it not the doctrine of salvation by grace that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions? Every other religion teaches in one form or another salvation by human effort. Christianity teaches that salvation is a hundred percent the work of the triune God. True, man has a responsibility in the matter of his salvation, but he meets that responsibility solely by the grace of God. Salvation by grace, then, is of the very essence of Christianity. To compromise that truth is to compromise Christianity itself. Shall we proclaim the Christian, the one and only, way of salvation in less than all of its Scriptural purity and fullness? That should be unthinkable. May God forbid it!

Does the Reformed evangelist in his preaching substitute doctrine – particularly the doctrine of salvation by grace – for Christ? No question could be more absurd. He is determined to know nothing in his preaching save Christ. Therefore, when a seeking soul asks him what he must do to be saved, it does not enter his mind to reply: "Believe in the five points of Calvinism, and you will be saved." He says what Paul said to the

Philippian jailer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). And it never occurs to him even remotely to invite the unsaved to enter the house of salvation through the foundation, which is election. He invites them to enter through the door, which is Christ. But — and precisely this is the point at issue — he preaches Christ as the *only* Saviour and the *perfect* Saviour. Because Christ is that, not a single stitch in the sinner's celestial garment is of his own making. In short, with the Reformed evangelist's preaching of Christ the entire doctrine of salvation by grace is bound up inseparably.

Here the question may be raised whether our missionaries should attempt to establish Christian Reformed churches in foreign lands. An affirmative answer to that question would be difficult to square with the principle of the so-called indigenous church. That principle stands in the main for self-government, self-support, and self-propagation, and, beyond doubt, is rooted in apostolic practice. It is clear, however, that in its application that great missionary, the apostle Paul, avoided extremes. He kept the newly founded churches in touch with the mother churches at Jerusalem and Antioch in Syria. He also kept building them up both in the Christian faith and in Christian conduct by visits and letters. In his epistles he emphasized nothing as strongly as salvation by sovereign grace and the life of love and gratitude to which that salvation obligates the believer. To use an anachronism, it is evident that Paul wanted the churches under his care to be Reformed. Likewise, we must strive to establish in other lands, not, to be sure, mere adjuncts of our denomination, yet truly Reformed churches. To aim at less would be to do the churches concerned a great injustice.

The danger is not altogether imaginary that for results we will look to the evangelist rather than to God. Arminians — and they are numerous among evangelicals — can hardly help doing that. They teach that every human being has "sufficient grace" to accept Christ in faith. Whether a given individual will do so, depends on his free will. Therefore it is said to be the task of the evangelist by his enthusiastic pleading and passionate zeal to induce the sinner to will; popularly put, to "make him come across." We of the Christian Reformed Church are not Arminians, but we do at times manifest leanings in the direction of Arminianism. Well may we be reminded that for conversions

we are completely dependent on the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is sovereign. It follows that, when conversions are few and far between, it does, on the one hand, behoove us to search the Scriptures diligently in order to ascertain whether our message and our methods are according to the will of God; but on the other hand, we have no right to jump to the conclusion that there is something seriously wrong with our evangelism. There are instances of faithful missionaries who labored long with little fruit. Robert Morrison is said to have labored for twenty-eight years in China for ten converts. Above all else, it follows that for all conversions, whether many or few, we are to give the glory to God alone. "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither is he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (I Cor. 3:7).

The most serious perversion of Christian evangelism remains to be named. There are, I suppose, in every religion under the sun elements of truth and goodness. They are due to God's general revelation, remnants of God's special revelation, and the operation of the common grace of God. Of those elements the wise evangelist will make use. He will employ them as points of contact. But there are those who are so deeply impressed by the good and the true in other religions that they deny the exclusiveness of Christianity. That is done, for instance, by William Ernest Hocking of Harvard University in such of his books as *Rethinking Missions* (Harper and Brothers, 1932) and *Living Religions and a World Faith* (The Macmillan Company, 1940). Nothing is more important for the Christian Reformed Church than that it insist uncompromisingly on Christianity as the only true religion. That it is such, permits of no doubt whatever. The seventeenth chapter of *Acts* tells us that, in the same address in which Paul recognized points of contact for his message in the religion of the Athenians, he denounced that religion as false. Did not Jesus make the majestic declaration: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6)? Is not His name the only name under heaven given among men by which they must be saved (Acts 4:12)? The triune God, who has revealed Himself in Holy Writ, is God alone. All other gods are idols. And of all the religions of the world Christianity alone teaches salvation by

the grace of that triune God. Only the Christian way of salvation leads to life everlasting. Every other way of salvation ends in destruction. That is strong language, but not a whit too strong.

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Attention has been called to several perils, associated with evangelism, against which the Christian Reformed Church should be on its guard. In view of those perils, shall we proceed slowly in extending our evangelistic efforts? Emphatically not! That would constitute a grave sin. To seek to avoid mistakes by being idle is wicked. The servant, in one of our Lord's parables, who laid up his pound in a napkin for fear of losing it, was deprived of it (Luke 19:20-24).

Of all Christians we have the strongest motive for evangelism. Of all Christians we have the gladdest message of evangelism. Let us, then, be up and doing, bending our every effort to the hastening of the day when the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9)!

The Church and Its Schools

VII

THE CHURCH AND ITS SCHOOLS

The schools of the Christian Reformed Church are Calvin College and Calvin Seminary. That is to say, they are owned and controlled by the Christian Reformed Church. That cannot be said of the Christian grade and high schools in which the majority of our children receive their primary and secondary education. It cannot be said of our Christian junior colleges. Nor can it be said of the Reformed Bible Institute of Grand Rapids, which provides commendable training for so-called lay-workers in evangelism. The remark may here be made that there is something strangely inconsistent about a church's willingly conducting a liberal arts college which, in addition to a pre-seminary course, gives pre-law, pre-medical, pre-engineering, pre-dental and pre-nursing courses, but refusing to assume responsibility for the training of unordained *religious* workers. Be that as it may, the fact remains that Calvin College and Calvin Seminary are the schools of the Christian Reformed Church.

God has blessed these schools with growth which is little short of phenomenal. In a sense they had their inception in 1864, when W. H. Van Leeuwen of Grand Rapids began to instruct one ministerial student, J. Schepers. In 1869 D. J. Vander Werp undertook, in the Graafschap parsonage, the preparation of four students for the ministry. Officially "The Theological School" was founded in 1876. G. E. Boer was the first docent. His students numbered seven. The upper story of the Christian School on Williams Street in Grand Rapids was the schoolroom. A curriculum extending over six years — four literary and two theological — was adopted. Soon the theological course was lengthened to three years. In 1892 a new building on the corner of Madison Avenue and Franklin Street — then Fifth Avenue — was completed. The catalogue of 1906-1907 first spoke of the

literary department as "John Calvin Junior College." The present twelve-acre campus was occupied in 1917. In 1920 Calvin became a full-fledged four-year college. In 1957 a new campus of 166 acres was acquired. In the first semester of the 1958-59 academic year Calvin Seminary had a faculty of 11, a student body of 104; Calvin College had a faculty of 90, an enrollment of 1908.

Calvin College and Calvin Seminary have proved veritable pillars of the Christian Reformed Church. With a few exceptions the men who now constitute the ministry of the church were educated at those schools; the great majority of the present teachers at Calvin College are themselves products of Calvin College, several of them also of Calvin Seminary; with but one exception the present members of the Seminary faculty are graduates of both Calvin College and Calvin Seminary; so are most of the teachers at the Reformed Bible Institute; and numerous graduates of its college are serving the church in other positions of leadership, notably as teachers in Christian grade and high schools and in Dordt College. What is much more important, the Christian Reformed Church is deeply indebted to its schools, most of all to its seminary, for its continuing orthodoxy.

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Christian schools, such as those under consideration, should impart learning and instil piety. Nor is that a twofold task. It is one, for learning and piety must be integrated, one with the other. To that integration the founders of Harvard University gave beautiful expression when, in 1642, they adopted the rule: "Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the maine end of his life and studies is, *to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life,* John 17:3, and therefore to lay *Christ* in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning." The Word of God describes that integration pointedly in the dictum: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7).

If *Calvin Seminary* is to serve the Christian Reformed Church as it should, it will have to put more emphasis on *learning* than it has done in the past.

Calvin Seminary has served the church admirably in point of orthodoxy. Whether it will continue to do so, remains to be seen.

In order to do so, it will have to stress orthodoxy no less than it has done in the past and learning more strongly than it has done heretofore. That many members of the present seminary faculty hold doctors' degrees is cause for gratitude. That others are candidates for the Th.D. degree at a Calvinistic university, the Free Reformed University of Amsterdam, is also cause for rejoicing. In passing, I cannot refrain from expressing as my opinion that the requirements for that degree at that institution are not nearly as stringent as they ought to be. In little more than one year a graduate of Calvin Seminary can complete what we Americans are wont to denominate "the residence requirements" for that degree. To the best of my knowledge, no such thing is possible at any reputable university or theological school in the United States. But that remark is not intended as a reflection on any "doctor" or "doctorandus" now serving on the faculty of Calvin Seminary. I hold each of them in high esteem for his scholarship.

Perhaps the most urgent need of Calvin Seminary is that it come to grips with contemporaneous thought. To be specific, it will have to meet the challenges presented by classical liberalism, the higher criticism, the dialectical theology, existentialism, threats to world-wide evangelism, the modern ecumenical movement, secularism, statism, the almost countless cults of the day, as well as the errors that are prevalent in evangelicalism. That will require much hard work and painstaking study. Only in that way will the Christian Reformed Church be assured of a ministry equipped to uphold competently the faith once for all delivered to the saints. And only then will our ministers be in a position to warn the membership of the church effectively against the onrushing tide of error which has overwhelmed much of the Christian church and threatens to inundate what remains.

If *Calvin College* is to serve the Christian Reformed Church well, it will have to put more emphasis on *piety* than it is doing today.

Christian education acknowledges that all of human knowledge is the product of divine self-revelation, whether general or special. It also acknowledges that God's general revelation in nature and history can be properly understood only in the light of His special revelation in the Bible. Therefore we define Christian education as God-centered education. In so doing we are

completely right; yet to the principle thus stated we often give little more than lip service. Not only do our theory and our practice lie far apart; the latter often denies the former. On this score our teachers at Calvin College confront a stupendous task. Let no one find fault with them because that task is as yet unfinished. I dare assert that it will ever remain unfinished. But it must be said emphatically that no one who does not labor incessantly, assiduously, and enthusiastically toward the accomplishment of that task has any business teaching at Calvin College.

One cannot teach philosophy as it ought to be taught at Calvin College, or for that matter in any Christian college, who has not made an earnest effort to fathom John's profound statement: "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (I John 2:20). One cannot teach history as it ought to be taught in a Christian college who does not see history in its minutest details as well as its entirety as the unfolding of the eternal counsel of foreordination of Him who "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan. 4:35) and who, overruling the doings of His most bitter foes unto the coming of His glorious kingdom, causes even the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10). One cannot teach psychology as it ought to be taught in a Christian college who has not made a thorough study of the Scriptural teaching that man alone of all earthly creatures was made in the image of God and after His likeness (Gen. 1:26). One cannot teach sociology as it ought to be taught in a Christian college without emphatic reference to the Biblical teachings that marriage is a divine ordinance (Gen. 2:18-25) and that the children of believers are in the covenant of grace (Gen. 17:7) and therefore "holy" (I Cor. 7:14). One cannot teach political science as it ought to be taught in a Christian college without defining the functions of the state in the light of Romans 13, Jesus' injunction: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21), and the broad Scriptural teaching of sphere sovereignty. One cannot teach economics as it ought to be taught in a Christian college without doing justice to the right of private property as implicit in man's creation in God's image and explicit in the eighth commandment, as well as to the Scriptural truth, evident

in the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 19:19), that self-love, in distinction from selfishness, is a good. One cannot teach art as it ought to be taught in a Christian college without relating beauty to holiness, as does Scripture in the expression "the beauty of holiness" (e.g., I Chron. 16:29). One cannot teach education as it ought to be taught in a Christian college without having become steeped in the full import of the Biblical assertion that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Positively put, John De Vries's *Essentials of Physical Science* constitutes a laudable example of the way in which the physical sciences should be presented in a Christian college.

The foregoing paragraph could easily be extended, but perhaps what was said is a sufficient reminder of the kind of teaching that its constituents have a right to demand of Calvin College. In the measure in which Calvin College meets that demand will it be a blessing to the Christian Reformed Church.

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There exists among us a difference of opinion as to whether Calvin College should continue under ecclesiastical control. That it is at present under such control is nothing strange, for the college is an outgrowth of the literary department of the theological school which was founded in 1876 for the sole purpose of preparing men for the ministry of the Word and the sacraments. Few of us, if indeed any, wish to see the thread of history snapped off overnight. Yet a sizable number of our Christian Reformed membership would have the church relinquish its control over the college to a voluntary association of Calvinists as soon as that proves feasible.

This volume is concerned with the future of the Christian Reformed Church rather than the future of Calvin College. If its chief concern were with the future of Calvin College, a full discussion of the aforenamed issue would be required. As it is, the future of the church and the future of its college, although not inseparable, are related one to the other. The oft-repeated saying that the church will go as the college goes contains a considerable measure of truth. Therefore, some consideration of the desirability or undesirability of continued ecclesiastical control of Calvin College is in place.

Two weighty arguments for the discontinuance of that control follow.

In the first place, the conduct of a liberal arts college, like the conduct of Christian grade and high schools, lies beyond the province of the organized church. To the organized church are committed the oracles of special revelation, and its task is to proclaim the Word of God, the Bible. That should be axiomatic among Protestants. The *Augsburg Confession* defines the church as "the congregation of saints wherein the gospel is rightly taught," and the *Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England* define the visible church as "a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached." But general revelation predominates in the curriculum of a liberal arts college, and, true though it is that general revelation can be properly understood only in the light of special revelation, the Bible is not at all a textbook of such subjects as mathematics, biology, physics, and astronomy. A minority report to the 1957 Synod on the subject under discussion was wholly right when it said: "Plainly, the apostolic task of 'teaching' is not a broad 'educative assignment' which is intended to show the Christian meaning of mathematics, chemistry, music, history, stenography, engineering. It is a teaching of the Gospel of salvation by Christ and of obedience to Christ. As Jesus taught, the Apostles were to carry on His teaching. They were to teach Christ Himself, as they did, and to teach the words of Christ, as they did, so that their teaching becomes the Apostolic teaching of the way of salvation (Cf. Kittel, *Theol. Wörterbuch zum N.T.*, Vol. II, p. 147). This was the kind of 'teaching' with which Jesus charged the Apostles whom He sent out. And it was this kind of 'teaching' which, with their 'preaching,' made up the ministry of the Apostles. No other kind of teaching belongs to their calling, or was exercised by them; nor does any other kind of teaching belong to the calling of the Church which Jesus Christ founded in the world through His Apostles." Let the church abide by its God-assigned task.

A second argument was superbly stated in the report to the 1926 Synod by a committee appointed to study the matter under consideration. Said that report: "Institutions of higher education are in the service of science *(wetenschap)*. Now science has its own rootage. It is not a product of the church, nor is it a

creature of the state. Out of the root of natural life, in connection with God's general revelation, science blossoms forth as a rich gift of God. If, then, science is to develop freely, it must create its own sphere and it must have its own organ in a free school. For that reason, too, the principle of the free Christian school is a sound principle."

Those arguments are irrefutable. In the light of both, it must be said that church control of liberal arts education is in line with Romish ecclesiastical totalitarianism. Ecclesiasticism is an evil hardly less reprehensible than is statism. Small wonder that more than one Christian Reformed synod has come to the conclusion that principle dictates that a Christian college is to be conducted, not by the organized church, but by a society, a voluntary association of believers. The Synods of 1908 and 1912 drew that altogether reasonable conclusion.

It is seldom wise to sever abruptly the thread of history or to flout an existential situation to which history has given rise. In awareness of that fact, the 1912 Synod, after declaring that from the viewpoint of principle it is more sound that a college proceed from a society than that it be conducted by a church, stipulated that the Christian Reformed Church could in good conscience transfer Calvin College to a society only if certain conditions were met. They were assurances of the maintenance of the Reformed character of the college, of the upholding of high standards of scholarship, and of the presence of adequate financial support for the institution.

Obviously, the first of those conditions has a most direct bearing on the theme of this volume. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that Calvin College would lose its Reformed character. That would not necessarily forebode the end of the Christian Reformed denomination as a Reformed church. The church does not unavoidably go as the college goes. Conceivably the church might in that case repudiate the college. Yet the influence of the college on the church is undeniably strong. It will continue especially strong if the college remains under church control, but also under society control it will be considerable. Therefore, almost certainly deterioration of the college will entail deterioration of the church. Thus the question how a society could insure the Reformed character of the instruction given at Calvin College becomes highly pertinent.

As an answer to that query is attempted, it must be admitted at the very outset that there is no foolproof method of keeping a college Christian. History shows that there is no infallible prescription for preserving the doctrinal purity of a denomination. Churches with the soundest doctrinal standards often drift far from the truth. Usually that comes to pass, not by a radical revision of the creeds, but by allowing them gradually to become a dead letter. Likewise there is no infallible prescription for keeping a college Christian. Not even the aforesaid excellent rule adopted by Harvard University in 1642 sufficed to keep that institution loyal to the faith of its founders.

Many members of the Christian Reformed Church who would otherwise be willing to relinquish the control of Calvin College to a society are unwilling to do so for the reason that they rely on church control to keep the college Calvinistic. While their concern for the doctrinal soundness of the college is deserving of the warmest commendation, it is evident that they are more sincere than realistic. To be sure, the Christian church has the promise that the Spirit of truth will abide with it and in it, but that promise does not guarantee the orthodoxy of any given denomination. It means that there ever will be a true church of Christ on earth. Every once in a while a denomination becomes apostate. That could happen to the Christian Reformed Church. Besides, the records show that, *when a denominational college gets caught in the tide of unbelief, it is more likely that the college will drag the church down with it than that the church will rescue the college.* And, frankly, the supervision now exercised by the Christian Reformed Church over its college does not excel in effectiveness. The interviews to which the Board of Trustees is wont to subject prospective teachers are not as a rule thorough. When the holder of an advanced academic degree is considered for a position on the faculty, it might reasonably be expected that the dissertation which he wrote in partial fulfilment of the requirements for that degree would be carefully scrutinized by the board. Yet that is seldom done, if indeed ever. The infrequent visits of board members to classes are at best a feeble attempt at supervision. And while synods elect seminary professors, they do little more than rubberstamp the board's recommendations for appointments to the college faculty. Am I finding fault with our synods and the Board of Trustees?

That is not the point I would make. I rather think that the church's supervision of the college is no more effective than it is because the feeling is widespread among us that, by right, it is not the business of the church to conduct a college. And that feeling is well-grounded.

In case a society should assume control over Calvin College, would it be proper to keep requiring of all members of the faculty that they subscribe to the Forms of Unity? On that question there could well be a difference of opinion. Hopefully, Calvinists of many denominations would join the society, and some of these might prefer other confessions, the Westminster standards for instance, as statements of the doctrinal position of the college. Conceivably the argument might be raised that, the creeds being ecclesiastical standards, they are hardly suitable as the basis of a non-ecclesiastical institution. And more than likely it would be contended that the example of the Free Reformed University of Amsterdam should be followed. That school requires of the theological "faculty" subscription to the Forms of Unity, but of all other teachers only a pledge of loyalty in their teaching to "the Reformed principles." If that course were followed, some specification and delineation of "the Reformed principles" would be indispensable.

If, in course of time, the Christian Reformed Church should relinquish Calvin College to a voluntary association of Calvinists, a highly competent board of control would be essential. Not every successful businessman nor, for that matter, every professional man, would qualify for membership on the board. Provision would have to be made for the preponderance of Calvinistic scholars to exercise guidance especially in such matters as the curriculum, the appointment of teachers, and the maintenance of the Reformed character of the instruction given.

For many decades there has been talk in Christian Reformed circles about the founding of a Calvinistic university. I fear that few of us have any idea how colossal an undertaking that would be. Yet the need for such a university is undeniable; nor does a beginning, on however small a scale, lie beyond the pale of possibility. Of the many reasons why a Calvinistic university is a necessity, I shall single out one that is seldom mentioned. Today most prospective teachers at Calvin College find themselves in the unenviable position of having to pursue advanced

The Library, Union Theological Seminary

studies at universities which are anything but Christian. They have no other choice. Teaching being largely imitative, the almost inevitable outcome is that their teaching at Calvin College will resemble all too closely the teaching which they received at those universities. But that is not at all as it ought to be. Not a single subject may be taught at Calvin College as it is wont to be taught at the University of Michigan or the University of Chicago. We urgently need a Christian university to the end that it may prepare Christian teachers for Calvin College and our junior colleges, and to the further end that these in turn may prepare Christian teachers for our high schools and grade schools.

It has been said that the existence of the Free Reformed University of Amsterdam renders the founding of a Calvinistic university on this continent superfluous. Against that position there are stronger arguments than that of mere distance. Time was when we of the Christian Reformed Church held the men of the Free University in so high regard, both for their learning and for their convictions, that we followed them well-nigh slavishly. To this day all of us perhaps will grant that such men as Kuyper, Rutgers, Geesink, Woltjer, and Bavinck, to name no more, were indeed stars of the first magnitude. By and large we esteem highly also the present professors of the Free University. And yet today's situation differs appreciably from that of fifty, or even twenty-five, years ago. We have scholars of our own who compare favorably with the ablest Reformed scholars of The Netherlands. Our confidence in the latter is not such that we are willing to accept their leadership without substantial reservations. And, as might reasonably be expected, we have a clearer understanding of America, which is not only the scene of our immediate activity but is also exercising a powerful influence over world affairs far beyond the realm of politics, than do they.

At this point I wish to make a very practical suggestion. The recent acquisition of a new campus for Calvin College and Seminary has placed the church before a serious financial problem. How can it dispose of the present campus, with its valuable buildings, at a price approximating the actual value? That question is being asked by many of us. In case the problem has not been solved when this volume comes from the press, I have a

suggestion. Our people in Iowa have their own junior college. So do our people in Chicagoland. Why should not our people in Michigan have theirs? If a society should be brought into being for the establishment and maintenance of a Christian junior college in Grand Rapids, that society could purchase the present campus, with whatever pertains to it, at a reasonable price. Thus the new school would at the very outset come into possession of excellent facilities, and Calvin College, which would then be a senior college only, could gradually move out to its new location. I make bold to go on to say that in my opinion the ownership of the senior college should pass to a nation-wide, rather a continent-wide, society, and under those auspices it should develop into a Christian university.

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Whether Calvin College and Seminary will in the future tend to keep the Christian Reformed Church truly Reformed may well depend on the laity socalled as well as the clergy, and on the common folk no less than the intelligentsia.

The history of the Christian church tells us that significant error usually begins, not in the pew, but more often in the pulpit, and most often in the professorial chair. And the Bible tells us that every single member of the church, even the most insignificant and inconspicuous, holds the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. By virtue of his prophethood he must follow the example of the believers at Berea who, having heard the preaching of the great apostle Paul, "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). And in case he finds that the things being taught by his superiors are not according to the Scriptures, it becomes his sacred duty to lift up his voice in protest.

May those who teach at Calvin College and Seminary never regard themselves as an intellectual aristocracy which dwells in an ivory tower far beyond the reach of the ordinary church member. And may the ordinary believer never suppose that it is beyond his competence ever to call into question the teaching of those scholars and that it would be only presumption for him to open his mouth in criticism of them. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God has perfected praise (Matt. 21:16). At Pentecost tongues as of fire sat upon the heads, not only of the

apostles, but of all the disciples, and they all were filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:3, 4).

True, God has often been pleased to build His church and kingdom through highly educated men. Moses, Paul, Augustine, and Calvin are examples. But at times He is pleased to correct the learned through the unlearned. When Abraham Kuyper was serving his first church, he had leanings toward liberalism. An unschooled member of his church — Pietje Baltus was her name — took the preacher to task. Had he been a small soul, he would have ignored her. But, great soul that he was and man of God, he gave heed. Henceforward he proclaimed passionately the Reformed faith, the glorious doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace, in all its Scriptural purity and fullness.

May God ever keep Calvin College and Calvin Seminary faithful to His infallible Word. But if error should overtake those schools, may the Spirit of truth raise up babes to confound the wise and prudent.

The Church and Common Grace

VIII

THE CHURCH AND COMMON GRACE

The early twenties witnessed a controversy within the Christian Reformed Church on the doctrine of common grace. Over against denials of that doctrine the Synod of 1924 made the following declarations:

1. "Concerning *the favorable attitude of God toward mankind in general and not only toward the elect,* the Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession it is certain that, besides the saving grace of God bestowed only upon those chosen unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God manifested to His creatures in general. This is evident from the Scripture passages quoted and from the *Canons of Dort,* II: 5 and III, IV: 8-9, where the general offer of the Gospel is discussed; while it further is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed authors of the time of florescence of the Reformed theology that our Reformed fathers from of old have upheld this view."

2. "Concerning *the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and of society,* the Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession there is such a restraint of sin. This is evident from the Scripture passages quoted and from the *Belgic Confession,* Articles 13 and 36, where it is taught that God through the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart, bridles sin in its unhindered breaking forth, as a result of which human society has remained possible; while it further is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed authors of the time of florescence of the Reformed theology that our Reformed fathers from of old have upheld this view."

3. "Concerning *the performance of so-called civic righteousness by the unregenerate,* the Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession the unregenerate, although incap-

able of any saving good (*Canons of Dort,* III, IV: 3), can perform such civic good. This is evident from the Scripture passages quoted and from the *Canons of Dort,* III, IV: 4, and the *Belgic Confession,* Article 36, where it is taught that God, without renewing the heart, exercises such influence on man that he is enabled to perform civic good; while it is further evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed authors of the time of florescence of the Reformed theology that our Reformed fathers from of old have upheld this view."

The reader of the foregoing three points can hardly help asking where "the Scripture passages quoted" and "the quoted declarations of Reformed authors" may be found. They are contained in a report submitted by an advisory committee to the Synod of 1924 and included in the *Acts* of that synod. Inasmuch as the only sure foundation of a doctrine is the Word of God, I shall list the Scripture passages referred to. As to the first point they are: Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 36; Acts 14:16, 17; I Timothy 4:10; Romans 2:4; and, with specific reference to the sincere offer of salvation, Ezekiel 33:11 and 18:23. As to the second point, the Scripture passages quoted are: Genesis 6:3; Psalm 81:12, 13; Acts 7:42; Romans 1:24, 26, 28; II Thessalonians 2:6, 7. And as to the third point the following passages of Scripture are presented as proof: II Kings 10:29, 30; II Kings 12:2; II Kings 14:3; Luke 6:33; Romans 2:14. It must here be remarked that, although the Scriptural evidence for each of the three points is convincing, not all of the passages cited are equally pertinent.

While the doctrine of common grace is undeniably based upon the Word of God, its foregoing formulation is not beyond improvement. Some suggestions seem to me to be in order. Firstly, it is insisted that there is "a certain favor or grace of God manifested to His creatures in general," but — whether intentionally or unintentionally, who can tell — Synod stopped short of saying that God *loves* all men. Yet Scripture does not hesitate to make that assertion. Jesus commanded: "Love your enemies . . . that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44, 45). The unmistakable implication is that God loves all men, even His enemies. Secondly, there is no evidence that Synod gave serious consideration to the question whether it would not be Scriptural to reserve the term *grace* for God's *saving* operations. Thirdly, one could wish that

mention had been made of gifts of the Holy Spirit to the ungenerate in the fields of art and science, such as are named in Genesis 4:20-22. Fourthly, the statement that the unregenerate are incapable of "saving good," although taken from the *Canons of Dort*, must be deemed unfortunate. Neither the regenerate nor the unregenerate can perform "saving good." Man is saved, neither by the good that he does before his conversion, nor by the good that he does after his conversion. Good works simply do not save. All Reformed confessions teach that most emphatically. For Calvinists it goes without saying. Therefore it would have been far better to say that the unregenerate are incapable of *spiritual* good. Finally, Synod did not come to grips with the rather thorny problem of the relation of common grace to the atonement, nor with the question whether, in bestowing the blessings of so-called *common* grace upon mankind, God takes a common or identical attitude toward His children and His enemies. However, in making such remarks as the foregoing, it is only fair for one to bear in mind that the Synod of 1924 had no intention of setting forth the doctrine of common grace in anything like its final formulation. In fact, it insisted strongly on the necessity of further study of that theme.

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There were those in the Christian Reformed Church who found it impossible to subscribe to the doctrine of common grace as formulated by the 1924 Synod. They founded the Protestant Reformed Church. By now that denomination has been split in two, and at the request of one of the groups thus formed the Christian Reformed Church has been carrying on conversations with it to the end of a better understanding by all concerned of the doctrine at issue. There is talk of that group's returning to the Christian Reformed fold. While I am one of those who hope fervently that this may come to pass, I cannot say that I am hopeful. From discussions with several ministers of that communion it has become clear to me that they not merely object to the term *common grace* but that, irrespective of terminology, they reject the three points in their main thrust. As best they would have their content declared extra-confessional and thus have their acceptance made optional. To me it seems highly unlikely that the Christian Reformed Church would consent to such procedure. To do so would, in my estimation,

constitute a serious mistake. So clearly are the three points taught in Scripture and the Reformed confessions that, aside from possible, desirable, and even necessary, alterations in their formulation, they must in substance be upheld. Let us hope that our Protestant Reformed brethren — of both groups for that matter — may see that.

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At times one hears the opinion expressed within the Christian Reformed Church that the doctrine of common grace, however true it may be, is a dangerous doctrine. It is said to be conducive to worldliness and to lead easily to the compromising of such doctrines as that of total depravity and that of the antithesis. But thus an unfavorable reflection is cast upon a truth. And that may never be done. To be sure, a truth can be abused, but that fact may never be held against a truth. Truth is always an unalloyed good.

How clear that the doctrine of common grace makes for the rare and beautiful virtue of theological balance! By that is not meant that it dulls the sharp edges of certain severe teachings of Scripture, that it weakens certain strong statements of Holy Writ, or that it relativizes certain absolute declarations of the Bible. It does nothing of the kind. But it does *complement* other teachings of the Word of God, and thus it imparts to theology a balance that is truly Scriptural. A theology is balanced in the measure in which it takes into account the *whole* of Scripture. A balanced theology is a full-orbed theology. And that means that a balanced theology not only embraces such teachings of the Word as seem to finite and faulty human reason to be harmonious, but also does justice to Scriptural paradoxes.

A few specific examples follow.

Scripture teaches unmistakably the humiliating doctrine of the total depravity of unregenerate man. By total depravity is not merely meant that not a single aspect of the natural man's being has escaped the ravages of sin; it also signifies that what Scripture calls his "heart," the inmost and dominant disposition of his soul or being, is so thoroughly corrupted that, instead of loving God, he hates Him (Rom. 1:30) and, instead of loving his neighbors, he hates them (Titus 3:3). Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually (Gen. 6:5), and "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). In

harmony with this teaching of Scripture is the declaration of the *Heidelberg Catechism* that "unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God," we are "wholly incapable of doing any good" (Lord's Day III, Answer 8) and the statement of the *Canons of Dort* that, although there remain in fallen man "the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior," yet "he is incapable of using it [this light of nature] aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and hinders in unrighteousness" (Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Article 4). However, Scripture teaches just as unmistakably that unregenerate man can do good of a kind. Said Jesus to His disciples: "If ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same" (Luke 6:33). Does Scripture contradict itself? Do the words of Jesus just quoted nullify, or at least modify, the doctrine of total depravity? Not in the least. Not a tittle do they detract from that doctrine. But they do complement it. The term *good* can be used in different senses. It may designate spiritual good; that is to say, good motivated by love for God. It may also designate what has come to be called civic good; that is to say, good motivated, neither by love for God nor by that love for neighbors which springs from love for God and is required by God in the moral law, but by that love for neighbors of which Jesus spoke when He said: "Sinners also love those that love them" (Luke 6:32). Unregenerate man is, of course, wholly incapable of spiritual good, but by the common grace of God he is enabled to perform civic good. And so, when a Christian reads in the sixth book of pagan Homer's *Iliad* that touching description of Trojan Hector's farewell of his beloved Andromache and their precious little Astyanax, he may well, with heartstrings vibrant, thank God for the virtues imparted by His good Spirit to the unsaved. And when he studies the history of Greek art, he may well praise God for the revelation that in the end the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:26).

Scripture teaches unequivocally the doctrine of reprobation. From eternity God chose out of the lost human race certain

persons unto life eternal. That very choice entailed preterition; that is, leaving others in their lost estate. And because of their sins the latter were by the divine decree consigned to damnation. Not only does the Bible say that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14); it tells us that there are those who "stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (I Pet. 2:8). Scripture teaches just as unambiguously that God issues to all without exception to whom the gospel comes a perfectly sincere invitation to repent, to believe, and thus to be saved. It is said of "God our Saviour" that He "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4), and "the Lord" is said to be "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). Let it be understood clearly that God not merely assures the sinner that He will be pleased to save him *if* he repents and believes; He assures the sinner that He will be pleased to have him repent and believe and thus be saved. Here is a most striking paradox. Says the Arminian: "Reprobation and the universal and sincere offer of the gospel cannot both be true. Acceptance of one necessarily involves rejection of the other. I accept the universal and sincere offer of the gospel." Says he who, for want of a better term, may be called a hyper-Calvinist: "Reprobation and the universal and sincere offer of the gospel cannot both be true. Acceptance of one necessarily involves rejection of the other. I accept the doctrine of reprobation." Thus both the Arminian and the hyper-Calvinist fall into the selfsame error of rationalism. Says the true Calvinist: "I do not see how both reprobation and the universal and sincere offer of the gospel can be true. I confess that I cannot square them with each other before the bar of human reason. But, firmly convinced that both are taught in the Word of God, I conclude that they in no way contradict each other. Subjecting my reason to the divine Word, I accept both as true." Therefore the *Canons of Dort* teach, on the one hand: "That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree. . . . According to which decree He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe; while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy" (First Head of Doctrine, Article 6); but, as was previously said, also: "As many

as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what is acceptable to Him, namely, that those who are called should come unto Him" (Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Article 8).

In the Foreword of his monumental work, *De Gemeene Gratie,* Abraham Kuyper called attention to the *wholesomeness* of the doctrine under discussion. It provides an antidote for unwholesome world flight and a basis for a comprehensive Christian view of life and the world. Said Kuyper: "The doctrine of common grace is derived directly from the sovereignty of the Lord, which is and remains the basic conviction for all Reformed thought. If God is sovereign, His rule must embrace the whole of life and cannot be confined within the walls of the church or the circle of Christians. The non-Christian world has not been left to Satan, to fallen man, or to chance. In the unbaptized life of the world, too, God's sovereignty is great and all-controlling, and for that reason Christ's church on earth and God's child cannot abruptly withdraw from this life. If his God works in that world, then he, too, must in this world put his hand to the plow, and then also in this world the name of the Lord must be glorified." Again, that great theologian and statesman observed that true Calvinists have ever chosen as their guiding rule the apostolic thought that all things are theirs and they are Christ's. (I Cor. 3:22, 23).

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Let it be said emphatically, the doctrine of common grace is not a dangerous doctrine. Contrariwise, it is a most salutary truth. However, to overlook the danger that it may be abused would be the height of folly. To draw a parallel: the doctrine of salvation by grace lies at the very heart of Holy Scripture; the Bible contains no more precious truth; but who can deny that in the history of the church it has frequently been made an excuse for godlessness? The Antinomians were but one of several sects to make that vicious blunder. And God alone knows how many individuals have done likewise.

The danger is anything but imaginary that we of the Christian Reformed Church will, in the interest of the universal and sincere offer of the gospel, relegate to the background, and even obliterate, the doctrine of reprobation. As was already pointed out, the Dutch Remonstrants committed that error. What hap-

pened in the Reformed churches of The Netherlands in the first quarter of the seventeenth century can happen in the Christian Reformed Church during the second half of the twentieth century. Let no one think that, in order to avoid that error, he must equate reprobation with election as an expression of the divine good pleasure. That erudite American Calvinist, Benjamin B. Warfield, was right when he observed in his *Biblical Doctrines* that in Scripture "the discrimination between men in the matter of eternal destiny is distinctly set forth as taking place in the interests of mercy and for the sake of salvation" (Oxford University Press, 1929; now copyrighted by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia). Yet in that very context he also asserted: "The Biblical writers are as far as possible from obscuring the doctrine of election because of any seemingly unpleasant corollaries that flow from it. . . . Their doctrine of election, they are free to tell us, for example, does certainly involve a corresponding *doctrine of preterition*" (p. 64). Then let no one say, or even intimate, that, if God decreed unalterably from eternity the everlasting damnation of some, the divine invitation addressed to the same persons to repent, believe, and be saved becomes a mere sham. True, that sounds logical, but such logic is the logic of rationalism, not of faith. He who reasons thus is as guilty of rationalism as is he who deduces from the doctrine of predestination that the gospel is only for the elect.

Again, the danger is most real that we of the Christian Reformed Church will so abuse the doctrine of common grace as to dilute the Scriptural teaching of the antithesis of the church and the world, the regenerate and the unregenerate, and in consequence will become conformed to the world. Keenly aware of that peril, the 1924 Synod issued, in line with warnings previously given by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, the following solemn admonition, ably formulated by Clarence Bouma as reporter for Synod's advisory committee on the matter in hand:

"As we observe round about us contemporary currents of thought, it cannot be denied that the danger of conformity to the world is far greater than is the danger of flight from the world. The liberal theology of this day in effect obliterates the boundaries between the church and the world. The high significance of the church is sought more and more by many in social rela-

tions. The awareness of a spiritual-ethical antithesis is progressively weakening in the consciousness of many and is being replaced by a vague feeling of a universal brotherhood. Preaching concerns itself largely with the periphery of life and fails to penetrate to its spiritual center. The doctrine of special grace in Christ is more and more being crowded into the background. There exists a strong urge to bring theology into harmony with a science devoted to the service of unbelief. By the press and all kinds of inventions and discoveries, which in themselves must surely be appreciated as gifts of God, a large part of the sinful world is being carried into our Christian homes.

"Because of these and other similar influences brought to bear upon us from every side, it is imperative for the church to guard the principle concerned and, while upholding the doctrine of common grace, to maintain tooth and nail the spiritual-ethical antithesis. Never may she permit her preaching to degenerate into sociological discussions or literary observations. Let her make certain that Christ crucified and resurrected ever remains the core of preaching. Without cessation let her cling to the principle that God's people is a peculiar people, thriving on its own root, the root of faith. And with holy zeal let her ever proclaim from the pulpit and through the press to our people, especially to our youth: 'Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.' Thus, with the Lord's blessing, our churches will be kept from a conformity to the world which would extinguish every glow of spirituality and rob the church of her strength and glory."

The Church and the Antithesis

IX

THE CHURCH AND THE ANTITHESIS

This volume does not aim to set forth in full any doctrine of the Reformed faith. Its purpose is to warn the Christian Reformed Church against threatening perversions of the historic Reformed faith and to remind it of certain truths to which it must cling tenaciously if it would continue as a Reformed church. To those ends, and only to those ends, will the doctrine of the antithesis now be discussed.

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If there are truths that lie on the periphery of divine revelation, that of the antithesis is not one of them. It lies at the very heart and core of Holy Scripture, and throughout the Bible it receives an emphasis which is truly tremendous.

The antithesis of the regenerate and the unregenerate is not a mere desideratum, nor a mere duty, but a God-appointed fact. True, its manifestation is a solemn duty incumbent on the regenerate, but that duty is predicated on the antithesis as a fact. And the fact was established at the dawn of human history and will continue to the end of time; yes, throughout eternity.

No sooner had man sinned in the garden of Eden than the God of all grace promised him a Saviour. It is highly significant that at that very moment God established the antithesis. Said He to the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The seed of the serpent are "the children of the wicked one"; the seed of the woman are the Saviour and "the children of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:38). Genesis 3:15 is known as the *protevangelium.* The first proclamation of the gospel is at once the first declaration of the antithesis. And it must be noted that God did not *command* the seed of the woman to be at enmity with the seed of the serpent. God

"put" enmity between them, and there it was. By a divine fiat the antithesis was established.

The apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus: "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). That description applies to all believers of all times and places. It was God who translated them from the kingdom of darkness into that of light. More precisely, it was God who *transformed* them from darkness into light. Again it must be noted that those who are darkness are not commanded to become light. That transformation is effected by God. And the added apostolic command, "Walk as children of light," is predicated on the divinely wrought antithesis as a fact.

The antithesis is the contrast of the regenerate, those who are spiritually alive, and the unregenerate, those who are spiritually dead. Since God, and He alone, makes the dead alive, it once more becomes clear that God is the author of the antithesis.

At the close of time will take place the judgment. The Son of man will come in His glory together with the holy angels, and He will sit on the throne of His glory. Men of all nations will be gathered before Him. He will separate them from one another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. The sheep He will set on His right hand, the goats on the left. To the sheep He will say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The goats He will command: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." These will go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into everlasting life (Matt. 25:31-46). Thus with the sword of His mouth will the Son of God divide humanity in two for the endless ages of eternity.

Between the establishment by God, in Eden, of enmity between the woman's seed and the serpent's seed and the eternal division of men by the Son of God in the final judgment, lies the history of our race. That history tells of countless wars interspersed with temporary truces, but basically it consists of an incessant conflict between the church and the world. That is the conflict of the ages, and it is never interrupted by so much as a momentary truce.

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Today many voices are being raised against the Biblical teaching of the antithesis. More than a few of those voices issue from the Christian church. Boldly, blatantly, the antithesis is denied, and for it is substituted the dogma of the universal fatherhood of God and the consequent universal brotherhood of man. Let no one think that this dogma contains no truth. Seldom has the father of lies concocted so consistent a falsehood that it contained not a jot of truth. In fact, he has a way of deceiving men by sweetening grave error with a dash of truth. God is indeed the Creator of mankind. Not only that; He created man in His own image; and in every man, no matter how deeply fallen, there remain vestiges of that image. Therefore all men are in a sense children of God and brothers one of another. However, in a deeper sense the natural man is no longer a child of God. He has disowned God as his father. He hates God. He has allied himself with Satan. He is of his father, the devil (John 8:44). And only he who receives Christ as Saviour has power to become a son of God, even he who believes on His name (John 1:12).

Numerous leaders in the Christian church of our day have carried the heresy of the universal fatherhood of God to its logical conclusion. They tell us that it is utterly inconceivable that a loving Father would sentence any of His children to eternal hell. To even suppose that He would, is said to be blasphemous. Hence we are witnessing a mighty resurgence of the ancient lie of universal salvation. It is as flat a contradiction of the antithesis as is imaginable.

Is the Christian Reformed Church in danger of renouncing the antithesis in the interest of the aforenamed heresy? No doubt, to many that question seems utterly foolish. That such danger is not imminent may be readily granted. But as for the more distant future, let us beware of overconfidence. As was pointed out in the chapter on "The Church and Heterodoxy," quite recently a minister in a denomination with confessions as Calvinistic as are those of the Christian Reformed Church violently denounced the Scriptural teaching of hell. What has occurred in that denomination can occur in yours and mine. An erstwhile influential member of the Christian Reformed Church once told me that his one objection to the teaching of Jesus was that He took hell too seriously.

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Throughout the history of the Christian church there have been in its midst such as perverted the antithesis by externalizing it. They resorted to what has been called "world flight." No doubt, that was frequently done with the best of intentions, but nevertheless it proved a serious fallacy. And although it often left an impression of exceptional piety, it actually amounted to sanctimony.

The name *Pharisee* probably is derived from an Aramaic word meaning *separated.* The Pharisees strove to avoid all contact with publicans and sinners. The Talmud tells us that a Pharisee might not eat at the table of a man whose wife was of "the people of the land," those whom the Jews, on returning from exile, found in possession of Judea. Church history tells of hermits, who went to live in out-of-the-way huts or shanties, and of stylites, who made the tops of pillars, preferably on the edge of some desert, their habitat. One stylite, Simeon by name, was immortalized by poet laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson. It is said that at first his pillar was only nine feet high, but he gradually lengthened it until it attained a height of sixty feet; the top was only four feet in diameter, and a railing surrounded it to keep him from falling off; there he spent the last thirty years of his miserable earthly existence. In subsequent times monks withdrew to monasteries and nuns to convents in an attempt to escape from the world. Today there are the Amish, who refuse to ride in automobiles and can easily be told by their sober apparel.

Likely those members of the Christian Reformed Church who tend to world flight are few in number, but it can hardly be said that they are non-existent. Occasionally one hears the opinion expressed among us that, when a believer joins an organization in which unbelievers predominate, he has become "unequally yoked together with" them (II Cor. 6:14). Some of us incline to denounce as "worldly" any and every amusement in which worldly folk are wont to indulge. Not all of us manifest a proper appreciation of the works of art and science produced by the unregenerate. What is even worse, all too often, when we ought to witness to the world, we hold ourselves aloof.

For that reason it can hardly be deemed superfluous to call attention to some of the evils that usually attend world flight. It frequently results in spiritual pride and an I-am-holier-than-

thou attitude. The Pharisee in one of our Lord's parables thanked God that he was not like other men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or that despicable publican who at that very moment stood afar off, daring not to lift up so much as his eyes to heaven; and he boasted of fasting twice a week and giving tithes of all he possessed (Luke 18:11, 12). It has a way of stressing spatial separation from the world to the neglect of the spiritual character of the antithesis and thus may lead to unspiritual and godless living. More than one retreat has become a brothel. It is bound to impoverish the life of the Christian for want of realization that this is his Father's world and that all things, the inventions and discoveries of the world included, are his. And it is almost sure to result in neglect of the Christian's duty with reference to the world. How, it may be asked, can he who withdraws from the world operate as the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

Nor is it out of place for us of the Christian Reformed Church to remind ourselves of Scripture's outright condemnation of world flight. With His disciples in mind, Christ said to the Father: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15); and Paul reminded the Christians in worldly Corinth: "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world" (I Cor. 5:9, 10).

Although the antithesis is spiritual, not spatial, in its essence, it does have spatial implications. A few of those implications may be specified.

Obviously, marriage has both spiritual and spatial aspects. Mixed marriages; that is to say, marriages of believers to unbelievers, are forbidden by Scripture. Yet they are of frequent occurrence. Not altogether infrequently do our Christian Reformed young people fall into this trap of the great deceiver.

While the position certainly cannot be maintained that it is wrong for believers to be members of the same organization with unbelievers, it must be affirmed that believers have no place in an organization which either in its constitution or in its persistent practices defies the truth of God and His law. That could conceivably rule out membership of our Christian Reformed

people in some labor unions and — who knows — in some associations of employers.

The Word of God emphatically forbids the religious association of Christians with adherents of any of the false faiths of the world. The obvious reason is that Christianity is the one and only true religion and that all other religions, irrespective of the elements of truth contained in them, are essentially false. The God of Christianity is God alone. The Christian religion is definitely exclusive. That is the precise thrust of the passage in II Corinthians 6 which begins with the prohibition, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," puts the rhetorical question, "What concord hath Christ with Belial, or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" and unqualifiedly commands: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" (vss. 14-18). In view of that passage of Scripture the Christian Reformed Church is on unassailable ground when it condemns membership in such an organization as the Masonic Order, for Masonry is patently a false religion. For the same reason it is a matter wholly of course that no member of the Christian Reformed Church, on moving, let us say, to Tacoma, Washington, where there is no church of his denomination, would give so much as a moment's thought to affiliating with the Buddhist temple in that city. But thus the question arises how it is that in some instances our members, when taking up residence in a place where the Christian Reformed Church is not represented, manifest no scruples about casting their lot with a church so-called which has yielded to modernism with its denial of the infallible Word, the Holy Trinity, the essential deity of Christ and the vicarious atonement. Here is a puzzling phenomenon. It is also alarming.

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The antithesis is accurately described as *radical.* It is rooted in what the Bible calls men's *hearts,* the inmost and dominating dispositions of men's souls. Some have hearts of stone; others have received hearts of flesh instead (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26). And, inasmuch as from the heart are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23), the antithesis must of necessity be *pervasive.*

Leading Reformed theologians have not hesitated to characterize the antithesis as *absolute.* That is strong language but, in view of the fact that it is the antithesis of life and death, not

too strong. The unregenerate are spiritually dead, "dead in sins"; the regenerate have been "quickened together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). And as sin has affected every aspect of man's spirit — his intellect, his will, and his emotions alike — , likewise the new life affects his thinking, willing, and feeling — his soul's every function. Once more the conclusion that the antithesis is *pervasive* proves unavoidable.

It has been argued that, because the regenerate and the unregenerate have certain things in common, the antithesis is not pervasive. That they have certain things in common cannot be denied, but those things they possess in different ways and of them they make radically different uses.

The regenerate and the unregenerate have humanness in common. By virtue of vestiges of the image of God remaining in them, the unregenerate are human beings. They are neither brute animals nor demons. Yet, because of the perverseness of their hearts they do not use those vestiges in the service of God, but rather, suppressing the truth by their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), they employ them in opposition to Him. In the case of the regenerate, on the other hand, the image of God is in principle restored to its pristine glory of "righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24) and that "knowledge" of God which is life everlasting (Col. 3:10). In consequence, their lives are directed Godward.

To say that the regenerate and the unregenerate have common grace in common would hardly be precise. Instead of regarding His children with that general benevolence and love with which He regards His enemies, God ever beholds them in Christ, the Beloved. He so sees them also when bestowing natural blessings upon them. Yet, undeniably the regenerate and the unregenerate have in common such *gifts* of common grace as, for instance, sunshine and rain, and much learning as well as numerous skills. God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Cain's godless descendants excelled in husbandry, metallurgy, and the invention of musical instruments (Gen. 4:20-22); and to Bezaleel and Aholiab, Israelites, God gave "wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary" (Exod. 36:1). However, of such gifts the regenerate and the unregenerate make differing uses. In

principle the former do to the glory of God their eating and drinking and all else they do; the latter do nothing of the kind.

Few will care to dispute that the regenerate and the unregenerate can and should co-operate in many worthy projects. This is to say that they have in common the doing of good. Both can be, and ought to be, good citizens. Jesus called "good" certain activities of the unregenerate (Luke 6:33). But what a difference exists between the so-called civic good done by the unregenerate and the spiritual good of the regenerate! The *Heidelberg Catechism* defines good works as "only those which are done from true faith, according to the law of God, and to His glory" (Lord's Day XXXIII, Answer 91). Only the regenerate are in a position to do good in that sense. The saying is true that a deed as such is but an empty shell and that the personality of the doer gives it content. When one receives "a new heart," he becomes a radically different person and, in consequence, henceforth leads a radically different life. Being in Christ, "he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17).

Then let no one say that common grace detracts aught from the radical, the absolute, the pervasive, character of the antithesis.

Finally, it must be granted that the regenerate and the unregenerate have sin in common. Both sin. The regenerate, too, offend in many things; all of them do (Jas. 3:2). But again, what a difference between the sinning of the regenerate and the sinning of the unregenerate! As our *Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper* puts it, whatever sin or infirmity still remains in the regenerate is there against their wills. Only they can say with Paul: "The good that I would I do not: but the evil that I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:19, 20).

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One more aspect of the antithesis must needs be touched upon. It is its *active* character. The antithesis is not the contrast of, say, white and black paint existing peacefully alongside each other, but rather that of light and darkness, which oppose each other and would drive one another out.

That the seed of the serpent actively opposes the seed of the

woman is apparent in all of history. Cain killed Abel. The Egyptians cruelly oppressed the people of God. The surrounding heathen nations were almost constantly at war with Israel. The climax came when the world, a worldly church included, crucified the Christ. But the world's hatred was not burned out on that occasion. It keeps burning against Christ's followers. Said Jesus to His disciples: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:19, 20). Christ's eight beatitudes are not descriptions of eight types of Christians, but so many marks of every Christian. The concluding one reads: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

I was lecturing to a class in Calvin Seminary. I made the simple, though sweeping, statement that every Christian is sure to experience a measure of persecution at the hands of the world. Several students expressed both surprise and dissent. How strange!

Believers must be active in their opposition to unbelievers. Obviously, they must oppose evil works wherever they encounter them. It must be confessed that we of the Christian Reformed Church have, by and large, been sadly negligent on that score. We must more energetically combat immorality in the community in which we live. We must by word and deed oppose social injustice. We must lift up our voices in vigorous protest against iniquity in high places. In that respect, too, it is high time for us to come out of our isolation.

That believers may not hate unbelievers as these hate them should go without saying. Christians are in sacred duty bound to love all their fellow men, their enemies included. Said Jesus: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which

is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44, 45). Likely it was during the reign of cruel Nero that Paul wrote to the saints at Rome: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not" (Rom. 12:14). Jesus' disciples must follow the example of their Lord, who prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), and of His faithful witness Stephen, who interceded for those who were stoning him to death (Acts 7:60). And, realizing that those who today are unbelievers may by the grace of God tomorrow be believers, they must in Christ's stead entreat them to be reconciled to God, all the time fervently beseeching the Holy Spirit to apply the gospel to their hearts unto salvation. In brief, the men and women of the world hate Christ's disciples; Christ's disciples love the men and women of the world. What an antithesis!

Not all has been said. As good a test of Calvinism as any is a willingness to accept unreservedly the paradoxes of Holy Scripture. In fact, that may be said to be the acid test of Calvinism. It is a striking paradox that God, who loves all men, also His enemies, hated Esau. He Himself declares in Romans 9:13, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." It is a hardly less striking paradox that God's children, who manifest the beginning of perfect obedience to all of His commandments, the commandment to love their enemies included, yet declare with the inspired Psalmist: "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Psalm 139:21, 22), and that the souls of just men made perfect cry out from under the altar in heaven: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10)

May we of the Christian Reformed Church ever bow our heads as well as our hearts before that paradox. May we do so because we love God.

The Church and Godliness

X

THE CHURCH AND GODLINESS

The founders of the Christian Reformed Church were a God-fearing folk. Without hesitation it may be said that they excelled in godliness. They had emigrated from The Netherlands, not only with an eye to improving their economic status, but also that they might be in a better position to worship God according to the dictates of their Bible-conditioned consciences. They were most insistent on Christian training for their children. Theirs was an orthodoxy that controlled their lives. Christian Americans admire the picture of George Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge. It was not unusual for our pioneers to kneel for prayer in stables, behind shocks of corn, or in the seclusion of the forest primeval. The "raising" of a new barn was a religious ceremony at which some farmer-carpenter would lead in prayer.

Much the same can be said of those who, in the early eighties of the nineteenth century, became affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church because of scruples concerning Masonry. They were convinced that membership in the Masonic Order is wholly incompatible with membership in the Christian church. In upholding that position, they were motivated by the fear of God. In my first charge, the Overisel Christian Reformed Church, my lot was cast among such people. What I said about that church in *As To Being Reformed* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1926), I now repeat. Seldom, if ever, have I labored among Christians "who conversed so freely, yet so tenderly, on spiritual matters."

Traditional Christian Reformed piety is not piosity. Piosity takes an I-am-holier-than-thou attitude. The charge, sometimes laid at the door of our Christian Reformed people, that they think themselves better than the members of other churches,

savors of malice. Quite to the contrary, they have a keen sense of their sinfulness and unworthiness. Piosity is stricter than the law of God. Therefore it usually condemns as sins, for instance, the use of tobacco and the most moderate use of any and all alcoholic beverages. Without recommending either of those practices, I feel free to say that the general run of our Christian Reformed folk has avoided those extremes. Piosity is wont to make a display of itself. Our people certainly do not err in that direction, but rather in the opposite. Too often, when they ought to witness for their Lord by word or deed, or both, they fail to do so.

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The Christian Reformed Church has been accused of dead orthodoxy. That accusation comes not merely from the outside, but at least as often from within. Its members are said to be much less zealous for good works than for sound doctrine. When some of its young people go astray, the reason is said to be that, in comparison with Christian doctrine, their parents and preachers put too little emphasis on the Christian life.

Who will reject that charge as utterly false? It may well be that orthodoxism is never completely absent from a church which stresses doctrinal soundness. It certainly is the sacred duty of every such church to be on the alert for that great evil. The danger of mistaking historical or speculative faith for saving faith, and of identifying traditionalism in the realm of belief with Christianity, is ever present. True faith is more than intellectual assent to the Scriptural *propositions* concerning Christ. It is an abandoning of oneself to His very *person.* Christianity is not mere knowledge *concerning* God; it is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). According to James, the brother of the Lord, there is such a thing as the orthodoxy of demons. They believe that there is one God but, for all that, continue as demons. And he has stated specifically: "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:19, 26).

However, may God forbid that the Christian Reformed Church should slip into the anti-intellectual error that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life, that faith in Christ is a leap in the dark, and that one can reject much of what the Bible teaches concerning the Saviour and yet believe in Him. Assent to the

Scriptural *propositions* concerning Christ is essential to trust in His *person.* In my considered judgment the Christian Reformed Church is at present in far greater peril of undervaluing doctrine than of overvaluing it. It is in danger, too, of overlooking the fact that one's religious beliefs determine one's conduct. Did not Jesus say: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)? He was thinking of freedom from sin and might almost as well have said that the truth will make men *good.* To be sure, He also said: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). Far from detracting from each other, those two statements complement one the other. The fact remains that one's behavior is determined by one's convictions. In recent decades even theological liberals have come around to that position. I once heard Stanley Jones speak on the question, "Do Ideas Matter?" The point of his lecture was that the pagan practices of the people of India spring from their erroneous religious beliefs. The conclusion is warranted that, if we belittle doctrine, we shall not only be undermining the theology of the Christian Reformed Church but shall also be destroying the piety of its members.

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The Christian Reformed Church was founded by immigrants and throughout the first century of its existence was fed largely by immigration. That goes a long way toward explaining its comparative isolation. And its isolation accounts in large measure for the negative emphasis of its piety. Isolation is a negative concept and spells a negative attitude.

Another factor that has contributed to the negative emphasis of Christian Reformed piety is the influence of what may loosely be called American fundamentalism. As they gradually come out of their isolation, our people are almost inevitably affected by their evangelical countrymen, whose favorite name for Christian conduct is "the separated life." Glibly and, it must be said, carelessly these are wont to quote the II Corinthians 6:14-18 passage, which enjoins believers not to be yoked together unequally with unbelievers, as proof for the position that separation from the world is the prime requisite for the Christian life. They overlook the fact that the specific teaching of this passage is that believers must make the break with unbelievers complete *in the matter of*

religion and worship and must, therefore, refrain from all *religious* association with the adherents of false faiths, such as paganism, Judaism, modernism, and Masonry.

The Christian life does indeed have negative aspects, but essentially it is positive. To an extent it is a separated life, but above all else, it is a dedicated life. It certainly entails abstention from evil but consists primarily in the doing of good. In fact, the Christian strives to crowd out sin from his life by filling his moments with virtuous activities. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise," on these things he thinks (Phil. 4:8). Admittedly, most of the ten commandments are prohibitions; but only then does abstention from forbidden practices constitute obedience to God's law when that abstention is motivated by positive love for God and neighbors. As great a sin as any is that of not doing the good. In the final judgment the goats will be assigned to everlasting fire, not for having poisoned the bread and the water of Christ's disciples, but for just having failed to give them bread when they were hungry and drink when they were thirsty.

Let no one conclude that Christian Reformed piety is wholly negative. That would be extremely unfair. Especially in recent decades more and more of our people have become active in such work as evangelism, the giving of Christian education, the exercise of Christian mercy, and the establishment of Christian labor relations. All that is highly commendable and indicates genuine progress. And yet, much room remains for a reminder of the positive character of true piety. All too often we forget that "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father" is not merely "to keep himself unspotted from the world," but as well "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (Jas. 1:27). Far too seldom do we let our light so shine before men that they cannot help seeing our good works and are constrained to glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:15, 16). Too many of us are inclined to slight the concluding phrase of Titus 2:14, where we are told that Christ "gave himself for us, that he

might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, *zealous of good works.*"

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The Christian Reformed Synod of 1928 dealt with the matter of so-called worldly amusements and singled out "movie" attendance, dancing, and card playing for special attention. Ever since, there has been a difference of opinion as to the precise decision of Synod concerning that trio of amusements. Some think that Synod declared an absolute ban; others hold that it issued a strong warning. Without claiming anything like infallibility in interpreting the mind of a synod, I wish to give my opinion. Possibly the fact that I served as a member of the study committee which reported to the 1928 Synod on the subject of amusements, and also as reporter of that Synod's advisory committee for this matter, will lend a bit of weight to my opinion. I hold that neither of the aforenamed committees favored an absolute ban. The advisory committee made that perfectly clear in its first recommendation to Synod. Regrettably, Synod rejected that recommendation. To me the reason seemed apparent. The church was dealing with what is popularly known as a "hot" issue. It felt that, if it said outright that it was only warning, however strongly, and was not forbidding, its position would be weak and of that weakness some church members might take advantage. Therefore it preferred a less forthright statement. But that course of action could lead only to confusion. It must be added that subsequent synods, that of 1951 included, did not succeed in their attempts to terminate existing confusion.

Be that as it may, two matters are clear. On the one hand, to denounce all "movie" attendance, all dancing, and all card playing as "worldly amusements" is an unwarranted generalization. Undeniably there are unobjectionable and even wholesome moving pictures, and who has the right to say that the Christian may view such pictures only in a church or a school? Scripture itself commends certain types of dancing. And Reformed moralists are by no means unanimous in condemning all games in which the element of "chance" is present. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that salaciousness and sacrilege are all too prevalent in the popular "movies" of our day and that the religious pictures are often the worst in those respects; that modern promiscuous dancing as generally practiced is highly conducive

to sexual immorality; and that card playing frequently results in superstition and gambling, as well as a waste of precious time. It follows that, while no synod has the right to proclaim an unqualified condemnation of the three amusements under discussion, a stern warning in view of the abuses to which those amusements easily lend themselves, and commonly do, is altogether in order.

That the decisions of 1928 were productive of some good, can hardly be questioned. Synod urged our people to give serious consideration to the report on amusements which a study committee had submitted to it. That report was in the main most commendable. A serious reader could hardly help being benefited by it. And it may safely be assumed that Synod's warning did not go unheeded. Likely there has been less indulgence by our people in the amusements concerned than there would have been, had Synod kept silent.

Every once in a while one hears it said that churches should abstain from "the cataloguing of sins." Evidently our Reformed fathers were not of that opinion, for the *Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper* declares to a rather long list of sinners that they have no part in the kingdom of Christ. And who will deny that it is a church's duty to warn its members specifically against the regnant sins of the times? Yet, experience teaches that the cataloguing of sins, however desirable, and even necessary, it may at times be, not infrequently leads to abuses. I fear that the synodical decisions of 1928 have had some unwholesome consequences. Three instances will be cited.

Attention was already called to the too negative emphasis of Christian Reformed piety. That this emphasis was abetted by the 1928 rulings on amusements permits of no doubt.

It is obviously impossible for a church to draw up an exhaustive catalogue of sins. Any list is certain to be a partial one. For that reason an unbalanced view of the Christian life may easily result. Church members will incline to take sins that are not catalogued less seriously than those that are. Has that not actually happened among us? We have been thinking of worldliness too exclusively in terms of certain amusements and have made relatively light of forms of worldliness that are no less flagrant and, in some instances, more insidious. The minister who craves the plaudits of men rather than divine approval, the

elder who contributes niggardly to the financial support of kingdom causes, the deacon who plans a business deal during public worship, the soloist who is more concerned about his own glory than God's, the toastmaster who relates obscene anecdotes, the woman who indulges in evil-speaking, the young man who neglects catechism for sport, the young lady who dresses immodestly, the artist who adores the irrational, the student who in his literary productions glorifies the vulgar, the young people who think it smart to serve strong drink at their parties, the parents who exercise no control over the television shows viewed by their children, the church which is interested in statistics more than in spirituality — all these are guilty of worldliness. Do we of the Christian Reformed Church zealously resist such forms of worldliness? Surely, to quote the author of *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* we are not resisting "unto blood" (12:4), in many instances not even unto sweat, in some hardly at all.

The cataloguing of sins by a church can result in the substitution of the conscience of the church for the conscience of the individual. When that happens there is a reversion to Roman Catholicism. It is said that the church of the Middle Ages thought for the individual, prescribed for him in minute details how he was to deport himself, and thus destroyed his sense of personal responsibility. Is that evil non-existent in the Christian Reformed Church? I fear not. When one of our girls, on being asked why she does not dance, can only reply, "Because my church disapproves of it," that evil is present. When one of our men, on being asked why he is not a Mason, replies in like manner, the same evil is manifest. Let it be understood once and for all that the conscience of the individual may never be stifled by ecclesiastical rules. That principle was upheld admirably by I. Van Dellen in his brochure on *Ecclesiastical Decrees* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1942). It holds, not only when ecclesiastical precepts go contrary to Scripture or beyond it, but also when they are in accord with Holy Writ. The Christian must never behave in a certain way merely because the church bids him do so, but he must ever walk consciously in the way of God's commandments. He must lead a Christian life, not in obedience to the church, but in obedience to Christ as Lord. Virtue practiced because the church commands it, is not virtue. Only then is virtue virtue when it is

practiced because Christ commands it. May the Christian Reformed Church never lose sight of that momentous principle. God alone is Lord of the conscience; the church is not.

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An important aspect of Christian piety is the proper exercise of Christian liberty. There is considerable vagueness, and even misunderstanding, among us on that subject. Greater clarity should be conducive to more godly living.

In Romans 7:6 believers are informed that they are "delivered from the law." The reference is unmistakably to the moral law of God, for in the very next verse Paul says of the tenth of the ten commandments: "I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Shall we conclude with the dispensationalists of our day that the decalogue was only for Israel and is not for the New Testament church? That question the overwhelming majority of our Christian Reformed people would answer in the negative, and rightly so. God's moral law is an expression of His very nature. As He is holy and just and good, so is His law (Rom. 7:12). Therefore it is unchangeable and has abiding validity. The Christian Reformed custom of reading that law in every Sunday morning service of worship is a good one.

In what sense, then, are believers delivered from the moral law? The answer is given in II Corinthians 3:17 — "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Christians are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Therefore they "delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). They walk in the ways of God's commandments, not under external compulsion, but from an inner urge. They love God's law because they love God. Such obedience is the precise equivalent of true liberty. And it has nothing in common with legalism. To keep the law solely because one has to, not because one desires to, is servitude. And the strictest obedience to the letter of the law is in the sight of God disobedience, if the spirit of the law, comprehended in the one word *love*, be neglected.

One phase of the Christian's liberty is usually denominated liberty *in adiaphoris;* that is to say, "in indifferent matters." On that subject there exists much confusion within the Christian Reformed Church. Just what are *adiaphora?* Are they certain material things? There are those who take that view. I have

heard it said, for example, that milk is a good thing, whisky an evil thing, but an automobile an *adiaphoron.* That makes no sense. Material things simply have no moral quality. Are *adiaphora* deeds which are amoral and, therefore, neither good nor evil? Obviously not, for since man is a moral being, all that he does has moral quality. Are they practices concerning which God has not revealed in His Word whether they are good or evil and with reference to which each individual is, therefore, free to follow the dictates of his conscience? But that answer implies a denial of the sufficiency of Holy Scripture as a rule for conduct. Are they actions concerning the propriety of which there exist honest differences of opinion among Bible-believing Christians? But the standard of goodness is the objective Word of God, never the subjective feelings of men, even the best of men; and the divine approval or disapproval of a course of action is not neutralized by the most sincere contrary conviction of God's child. What, then, are *adiaphora?* The answer is really very simple. They are acts of which Scripture approves without commanding them. In his standard work on *Reformed Dogmatics* Herman Bavinck has defined an *adiaphoron* pointedly as "*das Erlaubte*"; that is to say, "that which God allows" (Vol. IV, p. 280). A Biblical example is the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. According to Scripture, this was not wrong (I Cor. 8:1-8); but, of course, it was not a duty.

To many it seems that liberty in indifferent matters is of so little importance that it hardly deserves to be upheld. But that is not so. Although Paul had his helper Timothy circumcised in order to gain the good will of Jews (Acts 16:3), when Judaizers demanded that he have Titus circumcised, he gave no "place by subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:3-5). When legalistic brethren and a legalistic church seek to deprive a believer of this aspect of the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free, he owes it, not merely to himself, but to Christ, to stand fast in that liberty.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Calvin has called attention to the importance of the believer's not permitting his conscience to trouble him about indifferent matters. Said that strict moralist: "The knowledge of this liberty is very necessary to us; where it is wanting our consciences will have no rest, there will be no end of superstition. . . . For when once the conscience

is entangled in the net, it enters a long and inextricable labyrinth, from which it is afterwards most difficult to escape. When a man begins to doubt whether it is lawful for him to use linen for sheets, shirts, napkins, and handkerchiefs, he will not long be secure as to hemp, and will at last have doubts as to tow. . . . Should he deem a daintier food unlawful, he will afterwards feel uneasy for using loaf-bread and common eatables, because he will think that his body might possibly be supported on a still meaner food. . . . In fine, he will come to this, that he will deem it criminal to trample on a straw lying in his way" (Book III, Chapter XIX, Section 7).

For Christian conduct it is necessary to distinguish between the *possession* of Christian liberty and its *use*. Freedom from law can be fully enjoyed only by him who is free from sin. The fact that the best Christian is still a sinner places restrictions on his exercise of liberty. For example, in the interest of sanctification he may have to forego things which in themselves are unobjectionable and even desirable. Jesus spoke of that when He said: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29, 30). He who is inclined to alcoholism should leave alcoholic beverages strictly alone. And he who with God's blessing has grown wealthy, but finds that he is setting his heart upon riches, may have to do in effect what Jesus required of the rich young ruler — give all away. For another instance of a restriction on the exercise of Christian liberty, because of remaining sin the believer's conscience is fallible. Not only may it fail to condemn sins, it may condemn innocent practices. When the latter occurs, he must refrain from such practices, for, as the apostle Paul said with reference to the *adiaphoron* of eating certain foods, "All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense," and "he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:20, 23). Nor is the conscience thus substituted for the law of God as the norm of goodness. God's law is the one and only norm. But he who overrides his conscience

does that which to his mind displeases God, and, in so doing, he violates the great demand of the law — love for God.

Scripture is emphatic in its teaching that the Christian may have to refrain from practices in themselves lawful, lest he offend weak fellow believers. Referring to meat which had been sacrificed to idols, the apostle Paul vowed: "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth" (I Cor. 8:13). In that solemn asseveration he was not using the term *offend* in its popular sense. Emphatically though he taught that Christians must serve one another in love, he did not promise never to do anything that might possibly *displease* a brother. In fact, he was quite unwilling to place himself under the control of legalistic brethren. There are those in the church who *take offense* at almost anything that deviates from their own traditions. To permit such persons to regulate one's life is folly. What Paul meant was that he would scrupulously refrain from knowingly placing, by his conduct, a stumbling block before his brother over which the brother might fall into sin. There are numerous believers who, with that example in mind, have resolved to practice total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. They go a step farther than did the apostle, for he did not vow under no circumstances ever to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Yet, who can deny that their loving consideration for the weak is deserving of warm commendation?

May we ever be mindful of the Scriptural admonition, "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

The Church and Its Preaching

XI

THE CHURCH AND ITS PREACHING

Preaching is proclamation of the Word of God. It may safely be asserted that on that proposition there is complete unanimity in the Christian Reformed ministry. All our ministers mean to uphold the two most basic principles of preaching: that it is proclamation of the Word of God *alone,* and that it is proclamation of the *whole* Word of God.

What was just said may seem commonplace, almost too commonplace to mention. Yet it is nothing of the kind. By no means all self-styled ministers of Christ base their preaching on Holy Scripture. Walking in the footsteps of the great Schleiermacher, the older liberals substituted subjective religious experience for objective divine revelation as the theme of preaching. One of them, Gaius Glenn Atkins, said in his *Preaching and the Mind of Today* (Round Table Press, New York, 1934): "I do not know what other sources, shot through with immediate power and passion, the preacher can draw on comparable with the drama of his own soul. It will all depend upon the range and veracity of his own experience and the extent to which it is humanly representative" (p. 196). The new orthodoxy tells us that the preacher cannot actually proclaim the Word of God but at best can only "witness" to it, for the simple reason that the Bible itself does no more than that. Not even evangelical Andrew W. Blackwood has always insisted on the Bible as the one basis of preaching. In his *Preaching on the Bible* (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1941) he made allowance for other bases. To say that the Christian Reformed ministry is unanimous in upholding the principles of *Scriptura sola* and *Scriptura tota* with reference to preaching, is to pay that ministry no small tribute. May it ever remain deserving of that praise.

For many years I have made it a point to witness in action men reputed to be great pulpiteers. To name a few, I have heard Herman Bavinck, Reuben A. Torrey, Newell Dwight Hillis, Francis Landey Patton, William Alfred Quayle, "Gypsy" Smith, G. Campbell Morgan, J. C. Massee, "Billy" Sunday, Benjamin B. Warfield, John M. Vander Meulen, John Timothy Stone, A. Z. Conrad, Simon Peter Long, Stanley Jones, Walter A. Meyer, Kornelis Van Goor, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Henry Sloane Coffin, Charles W. Gilkey, Clarence Edward Macartney, F. Paul McConkey, J. Gresham Machen, Samuel Volbeda, Harry A. Ironside, Reinhold Niebuhr, "Billy" Graham, Peter H. Eldersveld. As to the content of their sermons, these men, of course, presented the greatest possible variety. Frankly, with some of them I could not worship, for obviously their God was not the only true God of the Bible. But all of them alike were easy to listen to, could grip and hold an audience, knew how to put a message across. In my estimation, every one of them, each in his own way, was truly eloquent. In comparison with such preaching, much Christian Reformed preaching can only be said to be insufferably dull. A few suggestions as to how preaching may, without ostentation or sensationalism, command attention are surely in order.

The practical is more interesting than the theoretical. Therefore every doctrinal sermon should be made intensely vital. That holds even of a sermon on the Trinity or the divine decrees. The concrete is more interesting than the abstract. For that reason illustrations are useful. One reason, no doubt, why the common people heard the Lord Jesus gladly (Mark 12:37) was that His parables made His teaching outstandingly concrete. The advice is still good that the preacher should turn the ears of his listeners into eyes. The contemporaneous is particularly interesting. Audiences are more concerned about the new orthodoxy than about the Socinianism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Lucidity of thought and expression are more interesting than are muddy thinking and vague phrasing. Simple words and sentences are more interesting than are unfamiliar words and complicated sentences. The apostle Paul said he would rather speak five easily understood words than ten thousand in an unknown tongue (I Cor. 14:19). Freshness of expression, short of straining for originality and with due recognition of established doctrinal vocabulary, is more interesting than are clichés and hackneyed terminology. The latter have a way of putting people

to sleep. Flowery language may become nauseating. Repetitiousness is usually the result of inadequate preparation and can only result in loss of attention. Mispronunciations and errors in grammar are not only uninteresting, but displeasing as well, for the simple reason that the ugly offends the sensibilities. A pompous delivery is disgusting because it suggests insincerity. On the other hand, a simple and conversational, yet forceful, delivery commands both respect and response. Enthusiasm inspires. Logic is convincing, the illogical confusing. As preachers let us have a heart. Let us stop wearying our audiences. Let us make our preaching so absorbingly interesting that even the children will rather listen to us than draw pictures and will thus put to shame their paper-and-pencil-supplying parents. But we may as well make up our minds that an absolute prerequisite of such preaching is the most painstaking preparation.

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One of the noblest traditions of the Christian Reformed Church is catechismal preaching. Article 68 of our *Church Order* reads: "The Ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian Doctrine comprehended in the *Heidelberg Catechism* so that as much as possible the explanation shall be annually completed, according to the division of the Catechism itself, for that purpose." May that rule be observed as faithfully in the future as it has been in the past.

At this point attention must be called to a strange and, it may as well be admitted, disconcerting phenomenon. In spite of regular catechismal preaching from our pulpits, our people on the whole excel neither in doctrinal knowledge nor in doctrinal discernment. Close contact with, and careful observation of, several Reformed and Presbyterian denominations which have no custom of catechismal preaching comparable to ours, have driven me to the conclusion that, by and large, the members of the Christian Reformed Church are perhaps slightly better posted on Christian doctrine than are the members of those churches but hardly, if at all, do they surpass them in doctrinal discernment. What accounts for that situation? No doubt, several factors have contributed to it. A few may be named.

What was said in the foregoing section of this chapter about our preaching in general applies also, and with added

force, to our catechismal preaching. Frequently, possibly one should say usually, it is particularly dull and drab. We seem to take it for granted that doctrine is inherently dry and do not even try to make its presentation sparklingly interesting. By divorcing special revelation from general, we make doctrine abstruse. By isolating doctrine from life, both the inner life of communion with God and the outward life of God-glorifying conduct, we fail to make it vital. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that much of our catechismal preaching, instead of stimulating interest in doctrine, tends to deaden whatever interest in doctrine our hearers may have.

I fear that a method of constructing catechismal sermons, which has been adopted by many of our ministers, may also be conducive to the present sad situation. I refer to the custom of basing the sermon on both a portion of the *Heidelberg Catechism* and a text from Scripture. Likely there is an excellent motive behind that custom. We want our hearers to know that we are not substituting a man-made creed for the Word of God as the basis of our preaching. But there are other and better ways of conveying that fact to them. As it is, when a sermon is supposedly based on both a text from the Bible and a question with its answer of the catechism, it is seldom based squarely on either. It usually does justice to neither. It is almost sure to halt between the two. Such preaching is more likely to create confusion in the minds of the hearers than to impart to them definite, clear-cut knowledge. Would it not be more to the point, and consequently more effective, to make unmistakably clear what the catechism teaches, to show convincingly that this teaching is derived from Scripture, and to stress strongly its practical import, particularly for this day and age? This, of course, is not to say that every catechismal sermon should consist of those three parts, and only those, in that order; but it certainly should contain those three elements. Such preaching may be expected to instruct, to convince, and to inspire.

A serious weakness of much of our catechismal preaching remains to be named. We want to make our preaching more constructive than controversial. That is commendable, for in every sermon the positive presentation of truth must predominate. But far too often we overlook the fact that controversial preaching can be decidedly constructive. As white stands out

most clearly and boldly when placed on a black background, so truth stands out most clearly and boldly against the background of error. A most effective way of defining truth is by distinguishing it from falsehood. Neglect of that obvious fact in our catechismal preaching will go a long way toward accounting for the vagueness and confusion that so frequently mar the doctrinal ideas of our people. Nor is that all. Perhaps the most serious weakness of the Christian Reformed Church at present is a dearth of doctrinal discernment. Generally speaking, our people cannot distinguish between truth and error as they should. Most of them know very little of what is going on in the ecclesiastical and theological world round about them and are practically unaware of the prevalent heresies of the day. And the catechismal preaching of our ministers has done little to make them aware. There is something exceedingly strange about that state of affairs, for in the *Heidelberg Catechism* itself the controversial note is prominent. It was drawn up to set forth the truth primarily over against the heresies of Rome and secondarily in distinction from Lutheran error. Its authors candidly confronted the doctrinal errors of their day. Our preaching, particularly our catechismal preaching, must meet the errors of this day head-on.

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For many decades now the social gospel socalled has been popular with modernist preachers. Due in part to the influence of the new orthodoxy, commonly known as Barthianism, its popularity has been waning; but it is still with us. It stresses the betterment of society but often ridicules individual salvation. And it teaches that the improvement of society is to be accomplished by human effort rather than divine intervention. Modern dispensationalism, on the other hand, puts all the emphasis on the salvation of the individual and would bar social problems from the pulpit. Said one of its representatives: "Society is on fire, but I am not concerned to put the fire out; my sole interest is in rescuing individuals from the fire."

In 1913 Louis Berkhof delivered a lecture to the student body of our theological school on "The Church and Social Problems." Already at that time he took the position that neither of the aforenamed views is tenable but that, while the gospel's first concern is the salvation of individuals, it is the church's

duty also to declare the social implications of the gospel. If I may be permitted to say so, I took a like position, and enlarged upon it, in "The Christian Pulpit and Social Problems," a 1939 article in the *Westminster Theological Journal.* So did Peter Van Tuinen in his contribution to *God-Centered Living,* a 1951 publication (Baker Book House).

It is likely that Christian Reformed ministers are unanimous in holding that the social implications of the gospel must be proclaimed from the Christian pulpit. And yet, their actual accomplishments on that score are well-nigh negligible. In this matter we fall far short of performing our full duty. What accounts for that failure?

Possibly our aversion to "topical" preaching bears on it. That term is in ill repute among us, and it is a fact that ordinarily topical preaching is not proclamation of the Word of God. When a minister chooses a subject and discourses on it, not on the basis of Scripture, but in the light of what great, or supposedly great, men have said about it and what he himself opines concerning it, he may be lecturing, but he is not preaching. However, not all sermons need be constructed according to one set of ironclad rules. To choose one or more verses of Scripture as one's text, to make the central thought of that text the theme of the sermon, and to subordinate the main divisions of the sermon, also derived from the text, to the thematic concept, preferably by the use of the possessive pronoun *its,* is, to be sure, an excellent method of sermonizing. For twenty-five years I have recommended it with variations to ministerial students. But if only a discourse thus constructed qualifies as a sermon, then some of the greatest preachers of the historic Christian church never preached a sermon. There is room for analytic preaching like that of the Reformers of the sixteenth century. There is room also for the synthetic sermon. When a minister decides to preach on such a Biblical theme as "The New Birth," "Justification by Faith Only," "The Forgiveness of Sins," "True Humility," or "The Necessity of Good Works," and chooses to discuss his theme in the light of the general teaching of Scripture on that subject, rather than on the basis of one or two verses, who has the right to say that his production is not a sermon? Many of the ablest catechismal sermons published are synthetic sermons. That has a bearing on the social impli-

cations of the gospel. They certainly can receive attention in textual preaching, but the question is altogether legitimate whether in many instances they cannot be dealt with more comprehensively, and hence more satisfactorily, by way of synthetic preaching. For example, in facing the problem of strong drink or the question when war is sin and when not, several passages of Scripture in various contexts would require serious consideration. If our ministers felt more free to preach synthetically, they would likely do greater justice to the social implications of the gospel.

There are more serious hindrances to our preaching on social problems. Here again, as at so many points, our relative isolation proves an impediment. Beyond doubt, we are in process of coming out of it, but we still have a long way to go before we shall be able to look back upon it as a thing of the past. In consequence, we have not been, and are not today, as deeply concerned as we ought to be about certain urgent problems of a social nature. For example, only recently has the Christian Reformed Church begun to give serious consideration to the race problem. And most of us give no signs of awareness of the fact that the present trend toward state totalitarianism, which is in evidence all over the world, also in this "land of the free," is threatening to rob us of our traditional American liberties, for the maintenance of which we Calvinists, of all men, ought to be most zealous. If the reader will bear with another personal reference, in 1948 I wrote an article for the *Westminster Theological Journal* on "Scripture versus Statism," but I have sometimes felt that it proved to be a voice crying in the wilderness.

A third deterrent to our preaching on social problems is of a most serious nature. To proclaim the social implications of the gospel is nothing more nor less than to declare the universal kingship of Christ. God has given Him to the church to be its Head, to be sure, but also to be "the head over all things" (Eph. 1:22). All human relations must be regulated according to the law of Christ. In the recognition of His supremacy and sovereignty lies the ultimate solution of all social problems. For just one example, how clearly that is taught in Scripture with reference to the perennial problem of the relation between employers and employees! Said the apostle Paul: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-

service, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; . . . *for ye serve the Lord Christ.*" And he went on to say: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that *ye also have a Master in heaven*" (Col. 3:22-4:1). But, alas and alack, although confessing the all-embracing kingship of Christ in theory, we of the Christian Reformed Church are not giving it nearly the emphasis which it deserves, nor are we applying it to existential situations as we ought. That will be pointed out in the next chapter.

Lest we lose our balance, a warning is in order. Most assuredly, our ministers must declare the social implications of the gospel; but may they never forget that the first concern of the gospel is the salvation of individuals, and that only he who in faith has received Christ as Saviour will honor Him as Lord in his social relations as well as his personal life. To quote from Berkhof's lecture previously alluded to: "If the question be asked, as is sometimes done, whether the Cross of Christ or the Kingdom of God should be the central theme of the pulpit's message, we do not hesitate to reply: the Cross – the Cross that was an offense, a stumbling block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek, but that is the power of God unto salvation for all those that believe. Yet with the distinct understanding that the pulpit should never lose sight of the fact that on the Cross the Kingdom is to be founded."

And in their preaching on social problems may our ministers be kept from posing as authorities on such matters as sociology, economics, and jurisprudence. May they likewise refrain from proclaiming the wisdom of men, even of such men as are recognized authorities on subjects of that kind. In fine, may they ever declare the Word of God, the whole Word to be sure, but nothing but the Word.

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All preaching must be Christocentric. Occasionally a Reformed preacher will demur at that dictum and affirm instead that all preaching must be theocentric. It is evident that he who speaks thus is positing a false antithesis. Both the sermons and the letters of the apostle Paul excelled in theocentricity; yet it was he who, in his own words, was determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). Christ is the

very acme of divine self-revelation. He came to declare the Father (John 1:18). He is the effulgence of God's glory, the very image of His substance (Heb. 1:3, ASV). He said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9) and "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). That makes theocentric preaching and Christocentric preaching synonymous.

We Christian Reformed preachers can afford to be reminded that all our preaching must be Christocentric. Occasionally one or another of us expresses an unwillingness to "drag" Christ into every sermon. But the inscripturated Word and the personal Word are inseparable. The living Word pervades the written Word. Therefore He must be present in every sermon. The minister who has not found Christ in his text must dig deeper. Sad to say, once in a while it happens that Christ is omitted from a sermon preached from a Christian Reformed pulpit. To be specific, I have on rare occasions heard in our churches sermons on the moral law of God that could have been preached without giving offense in a Jewish synagogue. This is not to say that those sermons contained anything untrue, but they did suffer from a most serious omission. "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). So must the law of God be preached that the hearers, even the most respectable of them, are brought under conviction of sin and, realizing their guilt and pollution and helplessness, flee to Calvary in order to abandon themselves to the crucified One. And is it not true that on the cross Christ bore the curse which His own had merited by not continuing in all things written in the book of the law? Is it not true also that Christ's perfect obedience to the law is imputed unto them by God for righteousness? Are they not wholly dependent on Christ and His Spirit for the desire and the ability to keep God's commandments? Only in Christ can they say: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). And is it not obvious that in the keeping of that law Christians should be actuated by gratitude for their deliverance from bondage to Satan and sin? They must keep the law because they love the Lawgiver, who declares: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2). He brought them out through the Saviour Jesus Christ. How large Christ

must loom in preaching on the law! He must loom as large in all preaching.

Christ is "the head of the body, the church: . . . that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1:18). In "all things" preaching is included. Among "all things" preaching should be most prominent. Can the church in the performance of its supreme task, the preaching of the Word of God, accord to its Head anything less than "the pre-eminence"?

The Church and the Kingship of Christ

XII

THE CHURCH AND THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST

Christ is God and as such is King over all forever. Theologians sometimes describe this kingship of Christ as *essential.* But they also speak, and properly so, of His *mediatorial* kingship. Said God of His suffering Servant: "I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:8-11). As reward for the mediatorial work accomplished by the God-man, God "raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." That kingship extends over the world as well as the church, for God "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:20-22).

This chapter will deal with the attitude of our Christian Reformed people to the mediatorial kingship of Christ over all things.

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The founders of the Christian Reformed Church were sons and daughters of the Dutch secession of 1834. Some of them had participated actively in that movement. When modernism

and Arminianism lifted their ugly heads in the state church of Holland, there were those who protested vigorously against those heresies and, in opposition to them, upheld uncompromisingly the Scriptural teaching of salvation by grace, which is the very heart of the Reformed faith. When the ecclesiastical authorities refused to heed their protest, they seceded. When the king of The Netherlands denied them freedom of worship outside the established church, they insisted unyieldingly on the kingship of Christ over the church. And when they were persecuted for the faith, they trusted in Christ as Head over all things to deliver them.

There were those in the state church who were sympathetic to the seceders and shared their grievances but were of the opinion that secession was too radical a step to take. Rather than to depart from the church, they strove to reform it from within. Their most outstanding leaders were Groen Van Prinsterer and, somewhat later, Abraham Kuyper. In the main they stood for all that the seceders stood for, but as to the mediatorial kingship of Christ they went beyond them. Not only did they uphold Christ's kingship over the church as well as His kingship over all things for the protection of the church; they maintained more vigorously than did the seceders that Christianity is an all-embracing view of life and the world and that Christ, being as a matter of fact King over science and art, labor and industry, economics and politics, as well as all other spheres of action, must be acknowledged as such. Kuyper affirmed with all the emphasis at his command that there is not a square inch of any domain of life which Christ does not claim as His own. Hence, not only were numerous Christian day schools established, but a Christian political party was organized, Christian institutions of mercy were built, a Christian labor association came into being, and the Free Reformed University of Amsterdam was founded. In 1886 there was a second departure of Calvinists from the established church of Holland, and six years later the churches participating in that departure merged with those of the earlier secession. *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* are the product of that union. The aforenamed emphasis on the comprehensive kingship of Christ gained general acceptance among Dutch Calvinists. The great Herman Bavinck, of seceder stock, maintained it no less forcefully than did Kuyper.

Throughout the decades the Christian Reformed Church has welcomed into its membership many thousands of Dutch immigrants. That they have exerted, and are exerting, much influence on our thinking goes without saying. No less strong has been the impact upon us of Reformed literature produced in The Netherlands. Thus it has come to pass that we, too, in theory at least, set considerable store by the universal mediatorial kingship of Christ. Its recognition has also produced some action. It accounts in part for the establishment by our constituency of many Christian grade and high schools, Calvin College, two junior colleges, several institutions of Christian mercy, and a Christian labor association. It must, however, be granted that in practice our witness to the headship of Christ over all things is weak in comparison with the witness of Dutch Calvinism. And it certainly is not nearly as vigorous as it ought to be. All in all, it is rather feeble. On this score we must confess to a measure of lethargy.

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What of that witness in time to come? Will it grow stronger or weaker? That will depend in large part on our reaction to influences being brought to bear upon it, some of which will now be enumerated.

The older modernism is still with us. May we not be misled by the legend that the new orthodoxy has supplanted it. To be sure, it has been modified somewhat by the dialectical theology, and several erstwhile modernists have turned Barthians; but classical liberalism is far from extinct. That holds also of its social gospel. This gospel makes much of the kingship of Christ, but it commits the fatal error of divorcing Christ's kingship from His atoning death. It scorns the truth that Christ's death was a substitutionary sacrifice by which He paid the penalty of sin and thus satisfied the divine penal justice. By rejecting the Scriptural teaching of the atonement it nullifies the mediatorial kingship of Christ, for the Word of God states most specifically that He was crowned King *because* He bore the sin of many (Isa. 53:12) and *because* He became obedient unto the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8, 9). May we never succumb to modernism. If we do, we may still do much talking, even boasting, of Christ's kingdom, but it will be a kingdom without foundation, a kingdom that hangs in mid-air, an air castle.

Modern dispensationalism, in contradistinction to liberalism, proclaims aloud the vicarious atonement and deserves the warmest commendation for so doing. However, it fails to recognize as a present reality the kingdom that is founded upon Calvary's cross. Some representatives of that school teach that Christ is King only of the Jews, not of the church. And dispensationalists generally deny the present rule of Christ over all things. At his first coming, say they, He purposed to establish His kingdom on earth; but, when the Jews rejected Him, He decided to postpone the kingdom until His second coming and to fill in the resultant gap with the church. In the meantime Satan has his day as ruler of the world. A famous dispensationalist preacher once concluded a sermon with the sentence: "God will save society when His King comes back." True though that is, the erroneous implication was that Christ is not now reigning over society. May we never become infected with dispensationalism. If we do, we shall have only a truncated gospel to proclaim and our Christian social activity will be severely restricted.

Karl Barth has said that it is folly to think that at Christ's first advent the kingdom of God came and is now found in the church and Christendom. According to him, Scripture does not teach that the kingdom has come, only that it has come nigh. When he was forced out of Germany during the Hitler regime, he testified that, in the struggle which resulted in his expulsion, he was actuated, not by opposition to German National Socialism, but by his serious difference with the so-called German Christians within the church. True, he subsequently stated that the church was in duty bound to protest against Nazism, but that fact must be accounted for in the light of his teaching that there exists no revealed will of God applicable to all times, places, and circumstances, but that the Christian is free to do the will of God as he is guided by God's eye from day to day and from moment to moment. And Emil Brunner has declared unequivocally that there can be no such thing as Christian politics. One of the outstanding characteristics of Barthianism is irrationalism. It has repudiated every rational method of distinguishing between truth and error, right and wrong. Therefore eventually it can only contribute to the liquidation of ordered society. May we never fall under the spell of the dialectical

theology. If we do, we shall have no program of Christian social action.

In recent years a remarkable thing has happened in The Netherlands. It is known as *de doorbraak;* that is, "the breakthrough," and represents a mentality which seeks to break down the dividing walls reared by the religio-social struggle of the second half of the nineteenth century and thus to bring about cultural unity for the entire population of that land. That mentality owes its origin in part, no doubt, to the growing influence of Barthianism, and also to such factors as the world-wide trend toward socialism and the united opposition of the Dutch people to German occupation during the second world war. Believe it or not, some avowed Calvinists are participating. Hence it has come about that there are today Dutch Calvinists who take an attitude toward social and political action quite different from that advocated by Groen, Kuyper, and Bavinck. Briefly put, they favor adjustment rather than antithesis. More particularly, while the leaders of yesteryear ardently urged that Christians should set up organizations of their own for such action, the men of *de doorbraak* belittle, and even decry, that method of operation. Inevitably, Christian social and political action is thus being crippled, and the witness of Calvinists to Christ's universal kingship is being enfeebled, if not silenced. May our Christian Reformed people refuse to lend their ears to the advocates of that movement.

Occasionally one hears it said that in these United States the conflict between believers in Christ and enemies of Christ has historically been less sharp and less violent than that conflict has been in most countries of western Europe. In support of that view it is argued that America was not subjected to the same extent as were those lands to the evil influence of the French Revolution. That there is truth in that presentation can hardly be gainsaid. To be sure, some influential early Americans, Thomas Paine for one, had freely imbibed the godless spirit of the French Revolution; yet the Declaration of Independence antedated that upheaval by thirteen years, and America was separated from its scene by a great ocean. The conclusion is drawn that in this country, in distinction, for instance, from Holland, believers and unbelievers can co-operate in numerous social and political projects.

That position need not be rejected categorically. Those Christian Reformed synods which held that membership in so-called neutral American labor unions is not in every instance incompatible with membership in the church, declined to reject it. However, at this point certain observations must needs be made. Let it be said with all possible emphasis, under no circumstances may the antithesis be neglected. This means that, as was said previously, no Christian may be a member of an organization which, whether by its constitution or by its persistent practices, denies the kingship of Christ. It also means that, when a believer and an unbeliever hold membership in the same organization and participate in the same action, they are not yet doing identical things. The one does what he does, for the glory of Christ, the King. The other has no such motive or aim. It must be stated no less emphatically that the believer's freedom to hold membership in a so-called neutral organization may never be used as an excuse for his asserting but weakly, or not at all, the kingship of Christ. The danger that this will occur is most real. He who fails to bear that witness in an organization for social or political action is denying his Lord. No Christian may continue within such an organization if he is forbidden to witness and prevented from so doing; nor may he rest content if his right to witness is restricted. If he has a choice between two comparable organizations in one of which he can witness more forcefully and effectively for his Lord than is possible in the other, he must give preference to the former. And who can deny that a united witness to the kingship of Christ by many believers will frequently, not to say usually, make a stronger impact than will the witness of so many scattered individuals? Surely, the Christian Reformed Church was on good ground when it repeatedly urged its members "wherever possible, to establish and promote definitely Christian organizations." That was done by the Synods of 1945 and 1946, and the 1957 Synod reaffirmed that position.

Ours is an age of secularism. The modern man is wont to divide life into two compartments which he keeps quite distinct from each other — the religious and the secular. Instead of doing to the glory of God his eating, his drinking, and all else that he does (I Cor. 10:31), he divorces the greater part of his life from God. By and large, neither labor nor industry is willing to be

governed by religious principles. The identification of the separation of church and state with the exclusion of religion from the affairs of state rates as one of the greatest of American fallacies. The progressive barring of religion from our public schools has resulted in their well-nigh complete secularization. What is secularism but the denial — whether thoughtless or brazen — of the universality of Christ's reign? If our Christian Reformed people are falling under its spell, may that spell be broken.

The boldest threat to our assertion of the kingship of Christ remains to be named. There is throughout the world a strong trend toward state totalitarianism. To be sure, in the second world war several totalitarian states suffered a crushing defeat, but from that conflict totalitarian Russia emerged far stronger than ever before. Even in the democracies, the so-called free countries, the trend toward statism is in evidence, and the United States of America are no exception. As the people of ancient Rome sold themselves to the emperor for "bread and circuses," so men throughout the world are today selling out their liberties to the state for a mess of pottage. The welfare state, providing social security for its citizens from the cradle to the grave, is immensely popular. There is little evidence that our Christian Reformed people are aware of that threat. Yet, as I pointed out in an article, previously mentioned, on "Scripture versus Statism," the totalitarian state is guilty of the enormous sin of usurping the authority of the totalitarian Christ. It follows that there is but one remedy for that great evil. It is not the totalitarian church of Roman Catholicism. Nor is it found in the vague and confused notions concerning democracy which are being bandied about in this day. The one and only antidote for the poison of state totalitarianism is recognition of the totalitarian rule of Christ.

It is clear that the Christian Reformed avowal of the universal mediatorial kingship of Christ is threatened by many views and attitudes and trends. It has never excelled in strength and may easily become weaker than it is. May that never happen. Contrariwise, may it grow far stronger.

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Are no influences being brought to bear upon us that tend to strengthen that witness? Happily, that question can be answered in the affirmative.

There is among us a growing conviction that the social implications of the gospel are to be stressed in the pulpit. As our ministers perform that duty with increasing faithfulness, they will inevitably dwell more and more on the kingship of Christ over every domain of human life and activity. They are bound to demand of rulers and citizens, industrialists and laborers, shopkeepers and clerks, educators and students; in short, of men and women in every profession, occupation, and walk of life, that they recognize Jesus Christ as both Saviour and Lord.

Our Christian schools are flourishing. By founding and maintaining them, we declare our belief that Christ is head over all things; and in them, if the instruction given is what it ought to be, that very belief is impressed on the minds and hearts of our children. These schools are themselves a powerful witness to the universal kingship of Christ, and they promise the continuance of that witness by future generations. And yet, at this point a confession is called for. Sometimes I am disturbed about the future of those schools. True, there are encouraging signs. Statistically our schools are doing very well. According to its latest report, the National Union of Christian Schools embraces 221 schools with 42,980 pupils and 1615 full-time teachers. Most heartening is the courageous stand recently taken by the Christian High School of Holland, Michigan, against the life-adjustment philosophy of our modern educationists. And yet, I fear for the future of our schools. I do so because of the feebleness of our avowal of Christ's kingship over *all* things. Obviously, we are less insistent on His kingship over some things than over others. For but one example, it cannot truthfully be said that we vigorously assert His headship in the realm of politics. Some of us seem to feel that this is not necessary. But why, then, is it necessary in the realm of education? Or is it? Is it possible that the mentality of the Dutch *doorbraak* is found among us? I can see that believers who deny the universal mediatorial kingship of Christ as a present reality may wish to maintain Christian schools for other reasons; and I deeply appreciate the fact that some of our dispensational brethren and sisters are actively engaged in doing that very thing. But it must be asserted unhesi-

tatingly that he who belittles that kingship is, in so doing, destroying one of the strongest pillars supporting our Christian educational system. So far as our Christian Reformed people are concerned, may that pillar remain unshaken and may their schools continue to rest solidly upon it.

There is another favorable force operating among us, and it is growing more and more powerful. In recent decades many thousands of Dutch Calvinists have emigrated to this continent, particularly to Canada. The Christian Reformed Church has welcomed them with open arms. Today they constitute a considerable segment of that church's membership. By and large they stand in the grand tradition of Groen, Kuyper, and Bavinck. That is to say, they strongly stress the mediatorial kingship of Christ over the church, and over all things besides. In that emphasis they excel. That is true particularly of their ministers. One often hears it said that our Canadian churches must adjust themselves to Christian Reformed usages and traditions. Of course, there is truth in that. But it is just as true that the Christian Reformed Church may learn much from them. By abiding by their present strong conviction concerning the kingship of Christ and imparting that conviction to the denomination of which they are an integral and increasingly influential part, our Canadian churches, with the blessing of God, may, I firmly believe, become an inestimable blessing to the Christian Reformed Church, as well as a great boon to the cause of the Lord Christ on this continent and throughout the world.

The Church and Ecumenism

XIII

THE CHURCH AND ECUMENISM

When, in 1942, William Temple was inaugurated as Archbishop of Canterbury, he described the present ecumenical movement as "the greatest event in modern church history." He may well have been right. However, whether it also rates as the most *blessed* event of modern church history — that is another matter.

The ecumenical movement aims at the visible unity of the entire Christian church. Some of its exponents would obliterate all denominational boundaries in order to effect one world-wide communion; others, despairing of the realization of that ideal, would be satisfied with some sort of federal union of denominations. Already many mergers of denominations have been consummated, and others are in the making. What is no less significant, such large and influential organizations as the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America and the World Council of Churches have come into being. The National Council embraces 33 denominations with a membership of approximately 38,000,000 and has absorbed the following agencies among others: the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, the Home Missions Council of North America, the International Council of Religious Education, the Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, the National Protestant Council on Higher Education, and the United Council of Church Women. The World Council is composed of 171 churches in many lands and is closely associated with the International Missionary Council.

Inasmuch as the aforesaid councils include in their membership churches that have succumbed to modernism and because they have frequently elevated outspoken liberals to positions of honor and authority, evangelicals have formed councils of their

own. They are considerably smaller and are known as the National Association of Evangelicals, the World Evangelical Fellowship, the American Council of Christian Churches, and the International Council of Christian Churches. In 1949 the Reformed Ecumenical Synod came into being.

The Christian Reformed Church holds membership only in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. It was one of the three churches which founded that organization and has continued as a constituent member to the present day. But it has in the past been affiliated with other councils.

During the first world war, to be precise in 1918, the Christian Reformed Church joined the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, the forerunner of the present National Council, in order to facilitate spiritual service by its ministers in the armed forces. Only six years later the church severed that connection. It did so because of the prevalence of modernism in the Federal Council. And in 1943 the Christian Reformed Church became a member of the National Association of Evangelicals. That relationship lasted until 1951, when Synod approved the following letter and sent it to the Association:

"Dear Brethren:

"At the meeting of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, held June 15, at Grand Rapids, Mich., it was decided by a large majority vote to terminate the membership of the Christian Reformed Church as a member of the National Association of Evangelicals.

"After a lengthly discussion and serious consideration it became apparent that our membership in the Association is not a happy one. The Christian Reformed Church is a close-knit denomination with a very specific creed and a practice based upon and in harmony with this creed. Membership in the National Association of Evangelicals, loosely organized and without a well-defined program of action, easily does lead and in the past has led to embarrassment and difficulty. It was felt that the testimony the Christian Reformed Church is called to bring in this day and in this world is in danger of being weakened by continued membership in the National Association of Evangelicals.

"It is our desire to assure you of our prayers that God may bless you richly in your efforts to bring your testimony in the way you feel you must give it.

Fraternally yours,
The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church
(signed) Dr. R. J. Danhof, Stated Clerk."

Subsequently the church has been invited to renew its membership in that association.

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What must be our attitude to the ecumenical movement? That is a question of the greatest import and also of considerable urgency. On the answer given to it hangs in large measure the future of the Christian Reformed Church.

For some time the church has been in earnest search for an answer. Not only has it long had a Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Correspondence; more than one study of ecumenism has been submitted to its synods. The Synod of 1944 had before it a report of no fewer than thirty-eight pages on "An Ecumenical Council of Reformed Churches and Correspondence with Other Churches," and that of 1950 received a pointed report on "Inter-Church Affiliation," which sought to set forth very specifically "the basic scriptural and creedal principles" related to that subject. It hardly needs to be said that those reports have not spoken the last word. Their authors would have granted that readily. The matter requires further study and formulation. Even now, however, in the light of the Word of God some definite positions may be taken on this problem.

In John 17 Jesus prayed for the oneness of all believers. That petition is often adduced as incontrovertible proof that He would have all His followers in one comprehensive ecclesiastical organization. But it is clear that the Saviour had in mind their spiritual, rather than organizational, unity. He prayed that they might be one *as He and the Father are one.* Yet it may not be overlooked that He also desired that that spiritual unity would come to visible expression. That is the plain import of the clause "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (vss. 21-23). Obviously, there are several ways in which the unity of Christians may become manifest; for instance, in the

declaration of the one Word of God and the leading of holy and loving lives. Organizational oneness is not the only way.

Theologians distinguish between the invisible church and the visible church. While that precise terminology is not taken from Scripture, the distinction expressed by it is clearly Scriptural. All believers are members of the mystical body of Christ, and the organized church is a manifestation of that body. Let no one think that there are two churches, a visible one and an invisible. That is not at all the case. Invisibility and visibility are two aspects of the one church. How obvious that the visible church must manifest the attributes of the invisible — with the sole exception, of course, of invisibility! Now Scripture teaches repeatedly and emphatically the oneness of the body of Christ. Its members have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, one Spirit, one God and Father; and together they constitute one body (Eph. 4:4-6). That prominent attribute, too, the visible church must display. This means that the church of Christ, divided as it is into many denominations, may never lose sight of the ideal of organizational unity but must labor incessantly toward the healing of its breaches.

That denominationalism is an evil when brought about, as has often occurred, by such sins as pride and heresy, goes without saying. Yet it does not follow that those who establish a new denomination for reasons of that kind are in every instance the guilty party. Sin may become so prevalent in a church that the faithful are expelled or are in duty bound to depart. Then those who remain behind are to blame for the division that has ensued.

It is very generally taken for granted, particularly in conservative circles, that denominationalism is altogether justifiable when it is occasioned by such natural factors as geographical distance or differences of language. In the light of Scripture that position is difficult to maintain. Instead of supporting it, Scripture would seem to condemn it. It is a far cry from the undivided church of the apostolic age to the well-nigh countless denominations of our day. Yet in Paul's day it was a long way from Jerusalem to Rome, much farther, relatively speaking, than it is today from New York to Tokyo. And does not the proclamation of the great works of God in numerous tongues on the day of Pentecost spell the transcendence of the Christian church over differences of language? To permit such relatively minor

matters to disrupt the organizational unity of the body of Christ looks a good deal like the elevation of convenience above principle.

Among those who honor the Bible as the infallible Word of God there are honest differences of interpretation, and it must be admitted that not nearly all of those differences concern trifling matters. Neither the Baptist nor the Calvinist will grant that the divergence between them on the doctrine of the covenant and the question who are proper recipients of baptism is insignificant. The Arminian accuses the Calvinist of failure to preach the "whosoever-will" gospel; the Calvinist brings the serious charge against the Arminian that in last instance he makes God dependent on man in the process of salvation and thus does great violence to the eminently Scriptural doctrine of salvation by grace. And neither the dispensationalist nor the Calvinist will admit that the doctrinal differences separating them are of little account. The Christian Reformed Church once deposed a minister because of his dispensational teaching. Such differences, undeniably of great moment, have contributed much to the division of the Christian church into denominations. It is altogether likely, and even certain, that this state of affairs will continue so long as we all know in part and our minds are confused by sin and its consequences. To assert that it is inevitable, is no exaggeration. To be sure, we may not sit idly by. When Christians differ as to the truth, they must strive to convince one another from the Word of God. That holds also of Christian churches. Just as the inevitability of sin in our lives does not excuse us from pressing on toward the goal of perfection, so the inevitability of division in the church does not excuse believers from striving for the attainment of organizational unity for the body of Christ. On the other hand, as the individual Christian has no right to expect moral perfection in this life, so to expect for the church perfect visible oneness in this dispensation amounts to an unwarranted anticipation of the new heavens and the new earth.

A principle of the greatest moment remains to be named. Scripture closely identifies the church with the truth. It was when Peter had confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, that the Lord said: "I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the

gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:16-18). The "rock" of which the Lord spoke was not just the man Peter, but very specifically the *confessing* Peter. And so it is taught here that the church is founded upon the truth and will ever continue to be thus founded. Elsewhere Scripture states that to the church are committed the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1, 2). And again, according to Scripture the church, the generic church, is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). Its task is to uphold the truth. In short, the church is where the truth is. Granted that perfect unanimity is not found in even the soundest church, it follows that the church may never compromise what it knows to be the truth. "Buy the truth, and sell it not"; so God commands us in His Word (Prov. 23:23). We must buy it at any cost; we may not sell it at any price. The church may not sell the truth even at the price of organizational unity. To do so spells self-destruction. The first and foremost mark of the true church is adherence to the truth.

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How do the aforenamed teachings of Scripture apply to the relationship of the Christian Reformed Church to the ecumenical councils of our day? That question is both pertinent and timely.

That the National Council and the World Council sacrifice truth to union is plain as broad daylight. It was pointed out incontrovertibly in his *Ecumenism and the Evangelical* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1957) by J. Marcellus Kik, associate editor of *Christianity Today,* and by Edward J. Carnell, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, in an article entitled "Orthodoxy and Ecumenism" in the September 1, 1958, issue of that periodical. The preamble of the National Council's constitution speaks of "oneness in Jesus Christ as Divine Lord and Saviour." In the present theological climate that description of Christ lies wide open to many divergent, and even contradictory, interpretations. The World Council calls itself "a fellowship of Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." That sounds good, excellent even; but at the time of its adoption that terminology was assailed as too narrow and exclusive, and after its adoption it has been interpreted in various ways. In *The Nature of the Unity We Seek* (Bethany Press, St. Louis, 1958), which is the official report of the North Ameri-

can Conference on Faith and Order — an affiliate of the World Council — foregathered at Oberlin, Ohio, in 1957, the door is left wide open for every church to "supplement and interpret" that formula (p. 190). And John Knox of Union Theological Seminary of New York, a leading liberal theologian, has described the allegation that Jesus is God as a "symbol." Active in both the World Council and the National Council are men who deny the infallibility of Holy Scripture, the essential deity of Christ as confessed by the Council of Nicea, the virgin birth and bodily resurrection of Jesus, and who heap ridicule and contempt on the doctrine that Christ's death on the accursed cross was a substitutionary sacrifice for sin by which He satisfied the demands of the penal justice of God. Among the constituent members of those councils are churches which not only harbor such unbelievers in their pulpits and seminary chairs, but honor them highly with other positions of trust and influence. If the Unitarian Church by its denial of the Trinity has forfeited every just claim to Christianity, what of such churches?

It is evident that the apostle Paul could have had no part in either the National or the World Council. Said he: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9). It is just as evident that the apostle of love would have refused to be associated with those councils. Said he: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (II John: 10). Aware as I am that sobriety is becoming to him who would apply the unfulfilled prophecies of Scripture to contemporary conditions, I have a growing conviction that such church councils as these are contributing to the hastening of the day, foretold in Revelation 13, when the human race, with the exception of those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, will be consolidated under the rule of Antichrist politically, economically, and also *religiously.*

Let it be definitely understood that today's modernism is not Christianity. J. Gresham Machen proved that irrefutably in his *Christianity and Liberalism* (The Macmillan Co., 1924). Modernism as described above is not a corruption of Christianity, but its denial. It is a false religion. And it was the religious association of Christians with the adherents of false religions that Paul forbade unqualifiedly when he wrote to the church at

Corinth: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:14-18). One cannot prove from this passage that a Christian may not be a member of a labor union which is not specifically Christian. Neither can one prove from this passage that it is wrong for a Christian to be a member of either the Republican or the Democratic party in these United States. But it does follow that it would be evil for the Christian Reformed Church to join either the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America or the World Council of Churches. All that our church can do with reference to those councils is to subject them to the critique of the Word of God and to pray that God may show them the error of their way. And that must be done, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear" (Ezek. 2:5, 7).

The case of the evangelical councils is quite different. The doctrinal statements of the National Association of Evangelicals and the American Council of Christian Churches, for instance, are unmistakably Christian. They affirm the inerrancy of Scripture in the original manuscripts, the Holy Trinity, the essential and eternal deity as well as the real, but sinless, humanity of Jesus, the depravity of man, the substitutionary atonement, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, eternal life and eternal death, and the spiritual unity of all believers. To such a creed the Christian Reformed Church can subscribe, and in such councils the Christian Reformed Church may conceivably hold membership.

In fact, there are several good reasons for such membership. The very existence of the evangelical councils constitutes a protest against the liberalism prevalent in the National Council and the World Council. Well may the Christian Reformed Church

join in that protest. For practical reasons the co-operation of evangelical churches in certain matters is highly desirable. That holds, for example, of the making of presentations to governments with an eye to the entrance of missionaries into foreign lands and the maintenance of freedom in the spread of the gospel by such modern means as radio and television. Most certainly, evangelical churches can co-operate in the distribution of Bibles. In that regard the Gideons and the World Home Bible League have given splendid examples. Last but by no means least, membership in an evangelical council of churches is one of several ways in which the unity of believers scattered throughout many denominations can be made manifest. Without minimizing the doctrinal differences among them, evangelicals wholeheartedly recognize one another as fellow believers. They esteem one another highly in love. One way of evidencing that esteem and that love is through fellowship in an ecumenical organization.

Still another good reason can be advanced for membership of such a church as the Christian Reformed in an evangelical council. No evangelical church has a monopoly on the truth, and every evangelical church errs to some extent. Therefore, it is said, such churches must seek to correct one another. Beyond all doubt, that is true and such is a demand of true ecumenism. However, it is questionable whether that duty can be performed most effectively in ecumenical conventions. Perhaps it had better be done by correspondence or through committees. Personally, I made an ineffective attempt at that sort of thing at the Second Congress of the International Council of Christian Churches, convened at Geneva, Switzerland, in the summer of 1950. My remarks were met by a storm of protest. To be frank, that reaction did not take me by surprise. I rather looked for it. In ecumenical assemblies one simply is not expected to bring up differences that divide the constituent members. To do so is highly unorthodox procedure.

It remains true that there are good reasons for the Christian Reformed Church to be affiliated with an evangelical ecumenical council. Does it follow that the Synod of 1951 erred in severing connections with the National Association of Evangelicals? Not necessarily. As was said previously, organizational unity at the expense of truth is an evil. That fact can hardly

be overemphasized. And Synod was convinced that in this particular instance continued membership of the Christian Reformed Church in an evangelical council of churches would be to the detriment of truth. In its letter of resignation it stated that the Christian Reformed Church has "a very specific creed" and that it was felt that "the testimony the Christian Reformed Church is called to bring in this day and in this world is in danger of being weakened by continued membership in the National Association of Evangelicals." It is clear that Synod was convinced that membership in the National Association of Evangelicals was imperiling *the specifically Reformed witness* of the Christian Reformed Church. What it did not do was to present specific evidence to that effect. To do that, might have been the part of wisdom. No doubt, Synod had in mind the fact that among American fundamentalists such errors as Arminianism, dispensationalism, and Pentecostalism are prevalent. Possibly it feared that close contact with such errors would unsettle the Reformed convictions of the Christian Reformed constituency. And beyond all reasonable doubt, Synod was aware that membership in the Association made the Christian Reformed Church co-responsible for the evangelistic testimony of the Association, which testimony could hardly help being tainted with the aforesaid aberrations from the Reformed faith. If so, its action was in harmony with the decision of the 1933 General Synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands that "complete co-operation with others, who are not Reformed, is out of the question when evangelization consists in, or is accompanied by, the preaching of the Word of God." In whatever way Synod may have conceived of the *manner* of the weakening of the Christian Reformed testimony, of the *reality* of that weakening it felt sure. Convinced as it was that membership in the National Association of Evangelicals was enfeebling the witness of the Christian Reformed Church to the truth, Synod could do no other than terminate that membership.

It is clear that the Christian Reformed Church can hold membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod without doing violence to the truth or weakening its testimony to the truth. It may even be said that Scriptural ecumenism requires such membership. And a far stronger statement than that is in order. In the concluding chapter of *As To Being Reformed,* written

thirty-three years ago, I envisioned "The American Reformed Church" of the future with all self-consciously Reformed Christians of this continent within its fold. Now I wish to go farther. Scriptural ecumenism demands that all those churches *throughout the world* which are Reformed, not merely in name but in reality, strive for one form or another of organic union. In time to come may the founding of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in 1949 prove to have been the first step in that direction.

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A concrete issue remains to be considered. It has been proposed that the Christian Reformed Church participate in the establishment of a school for united theological education in Nigeria. The Synod of 1958 appointed a committee to study this proposal. That committee is required to view the matter from all possible angles and to prepare a report that will do full justice to the church's Reformed position. But surely a few reflections on the subject at this time can hardly be ruled out of order.

It is important for the Christian Reformed Church to understand what it is being asked to do. We are not being asked merely to lend one of our theologians to an existing united seminary to the specific end that he may teach the Reformed faith. We are being asked to participate in the establishment and maintenance of a school for united theological education. That would mean deep involvement in, and co-responsibility for, the entire program of the proposed school. And we are being asked to participate in the founding of such a school *instead of* a Reformed seminary.

Synod was informed that in the proposed school instruction would be given by men of various theological convictions; for instance, by Baptists, Arminians, and Calvinists. But united education given under such diverse auspices cannot but prove to be disunited education if the teachers are loyal to their convictions. The Baptist is firmly convinced that only believers are to be baptized. Although I disagree with him heartily, I respect him for ardently upholding that position. The Arminian is firmly convinced of the Scripturalness of his version of the "whosoever-will" gospel. Although I think him to be seriously in error, I can hardly respect him if he does not enthusiastically preach what he believes to be the gospel. And what is one to

think of a Calvinist who fails to stress the five points of Calvinism and the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace? But self-contradictory theological education cannot be expected to produce ministers with strong theological convictions — least of all on a mission field. To the production of such spiritual leaders an *integrated* theological education in a definitely *confessional* theological school is, to say the very least, highly conducive.

It goes altogether without saying that our missionaries in Nigeria should not attempt to impose upon the Christians of that land every tradition of the Christian Reformed Church or make an issue of every doctrinal controversy that has ever held the attention of the Christian Reformed Church. To try to establish in Nigeria a church which will in every detail be a duplicate of the Christian Reformed Church would be the height of folly. On that, it may safely be assumed, there is unanimity among us. But that is not at all the point at issue.

Let no one say that infant baptism is not an issue on the Nigerian field. When parents are converted from another religion to Christianity, the question whether or not their children shall be baptized becomes at once a burning issue.

Let no one assert that the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism is not an issue on the Nigerian field. How fast can one close one's eyes to the entire history of Christian doctrine? Throughout that history the question whether God saves the sinner or the sinner saves himself has been an issue of paramount importance. Always the doctrine of salvation by grace has been at stake. There is not a single doctrine to which the Christian church has found it more difficult to adhere consistently. It was the issue in Paul's controversy with the Judaizers of his day, in Augustine's controversy with Pelagius, in the controversy of Luther and Calvin with Rome, in the synergist controversy in the Lutheran churches, in the Remonstrant controversy in the Reformed churches of Holland. It is the issue in the controversy between the truly Reformed churches of our day and the Wesleyan Arminianism which is rampant in evangelicalism, not merely in America, but the world over. And, because of the prominence of the doctrine of salvation in the missionary's message, it is sure to be an issue on every mission field. On account of the universality of human self-righteousness

it is bound to be an issue of supreme moment wherever the glad tidings of salvation are proclaimed. Not many years ago it was a burning issue in Ceylon, and our representatives, notably John O. Schuring, faced it courageously. In an eloquent address to the 1958 Synod Bassam Madany made the point that the Moslem world has no greater need than the distinctively Reformed presentation of the gospel. For years now our radio minister, Peter H. Eldersveld, has been proclaiming the Reformed faith unashamedly and uncompromisingly to the world. Nothing is as important for the preacher of the gospel as that he declare the unadulterated gospel of salvation by the grace of God.

Let no one suggest that Arminianism is a relatively harmless error. The statement, although true, that it is not as bad as Pelagianism is hardly complimentary to Arminianism, for it amounts to saying that Arminianism is not outright paganism. Paganism and Pelagianism are agreed that, insofar as he needs salvation, man is abundantly able to save himself. That certainly is not the teaching of Arminianism. Yet it does at a most crucial point deny man's dependence on the grace of God for salvation. Not only does it teach that the ground of divine election is the foreseen faith of man; it goes on to say that Christ designed by His death to save all men, that He died for all in the same sense, that by the atonement He did no more than to make salvation *possible* for all, and that now it is for the individual to make his salvation *actual* through faith. And it asserts emphatically that every human being, even the unregenerate, is able of his own free will to receive Christ as Saviour. Thus in last instance Arminianism makes man his own savior. Small wonder that the *Canons of Dort*, which Benjamin B. Warfield described in his *Studies in Theology* (Oxford University Press, 1932; now copyrighted by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.) as "a singularly well-considered, prudent, and restrained Reformed formulary" (p. 145), condemned Arminianism as an exceedingly grave error. The same erudite and well-balanced American Calvinist was speaking of Arminianism when he said in *The Plan of Salvation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1935): "The issue is indeed a fundamental one and it is clearly drawn. Is it God the Lord that saves us, or is it we ourselves? And does God the Lord save us, or does he merely open the way to salva-

tion, and leave it, according to our choice, to walk in it or not? The parting of the ways is the old parting of the ways between Christianity and autosoterism. Certainly only he can claim to be evangelical who with full consciousness rests entirely on God and on God alone for his salvation" (p. 108). Is the Christian Reformed Church going to assume co-responsibility for the teaching of so serious a heresy as Arminianism?

Shall we on a mission field soft-pedal the five points of Calvinism? That has been suggested on the ground that in some fields they are not pertinent to the existential situation. But they are an essential part — although not the whole — of the Reformed faith. And what is the Reformed faith? An appendage to the Christian faith? Not by any manner of means. It is the Christian faith itself in its purest and most comprehensive expression. And the five points of Calvinism are none other than an unadulterated formulation of that truth which lies at the very heart of Christianity — salvation by the sovereign grace of God. To be sure, in their presentation all extremism must be scrupulously avoided. But shall we fail to bring that truth in all its Scriptural purity and fullness to those to whom we preach the gospel? Shall we withhold that truth from any tribe or nation? Will the Christian Reformed Church be satisfied to proclaim a watered-down gospel? May God forbid!

In my labors as preacher and teacher I have made the acquaintance of a great many Christians with an Arminian background. As brethren and sisters in the Lord, I have always held them in the highest esteem. We were drawn closely together by the bond of Christian love. But it has been my unpleasant task to tell them that Arminianism is a station on the road to Pelagianism. When saying that, I made it abundantly clear that certainly not every individual on that road is sure to travel it to the end. Yet the objective fact remains. The Bible teaches that salvation is the work of God from beginning to end. Whatever contribution man makes to his salvation, he makes by the grace of God. Pelagianism teaches that the sinner, insofar as he needs salvation, can save himself from beginning to end. Arminianism teaches that God has made salvation possible for all but has left it to each individual to make it actual in his case. Now that compromising position of Arminianism explains in large measure one of the saddest chapters in American church

history. It is the rapid descent of much of New England Calvinism all the way to Unitarianism. In his doctoral dissertation, *The Rise and Development of Liberal Theology in America,* Winfield Burggraaff has shown convincingly that that decline began with a compromise with Arminianism. Another warning example is afforded by Union Theological Seminary of New York, once a Presbyterian school, now for a great many decades a stronghold of liberalism. From its founding in 1836 it was sympathetic toward New School Presbyterianism, which was more tolerant of views kindred to Arminianism than was Presbyterianism of the Old School. In distinction from such an Old School institution as Princeton Theological Seminary, which, sad to say, has by now also fallen under the spell of modernism and neo-orthodoxy, Union Seminary carried the seeds of liberalism within it from the very outset.

I have mentioned some of the errors which, the 1958 Synod was informed, are or will be represented on the faculty of the Nigerian school in which the Christian Reformed Church is being asked to participate for united theological education. There may be others. I have singled out Arminianism for special attention because it is questionable whether any error of present-day evangelicalism is more prevalent or more serious. Nothing could be clearer than that the adoption of the proposal before us would constitute a step toward union at the expense of specifically Reformed theology. Some may argue that it should be adopted in the hope of accomplishing much good. But the end never justifies the means. It is sinful to do even a little evil in order to bring about a great good. And in this instance the evil is not little. Besides, a step in the wrong direction now will almost certainly be followed by further steps in the same direction. History teaches that a church which has begun to weaken in its testimony to the truth will usually before long succumb to error. Union to the detriment of truth is characteristic of the liberal ecumenical movement. It is also the road to liberalism.

To state the case positively, the Christian Reformed Church can do God's people in Nigeria, both those who have been brought into the fold and those who remain to be gathered in, an inestimable service by bending its every effort toward providing for them a thoroughly Reformed ministry.

The Church and Its Influence

XIV

THE CHURCH AND ITS INFLUENCE

It is felt among us rather generally that the influence exerted by the Christian Reformed Church beyond its own bounds is so small as to be almost negligible. We gather that in part from the fact — and it is a fact — that in volumes on American church history and in reference works such as religious encyclopedias and the like we receive little recognition.

Although the influence of a church cannot be measured with a high degree of precision, I venture to assert that the influence of the Christian Reformed Church to the outside is far from negligible. When saying that, I have in mind the following facts among others. Our ministers and missionaries are found on every continent. Our home missionaries are today bringing the gospel to men of many national and denominational backgrounds. Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* is being used in several seminaries and Bible schools, and the Reformed literature produced by our constituency is definitely on the increase. Sons of the Christian Reformed Church are serving on both the faculty and the board of Westminster Theological Seminary, the graduates of which institution are operating as a savory salt in many denominations and are laboring as missionaries in many lands. Almost all of our churches are actively engaged in environmental evangelism. Perhaps most significant of all, on the Back to God Hour we are proclaiming around the globe the gospel of the grace of God.

Admittedly, we are not a popular church. Although Calvinism is said to be growing in popularity, it certainly does not excel in that respect. Suppose the Christian Reformed Church should go out and out liberal or Barthian or dispensational; in any case it would likely gain in recognition, but its influence would unavoidably grow less wholesome and likely less strong.

As it is, our influence exceeds our popularity. And that is not a bad situation.

Let no one infer that our present situation is ideal. Our influence must be enhanced. In fact, there is great need of that. Some ways in which it may be accomplished will be recommended.

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By this time it has become trite to say that we must come out of our isolation. And that statement needs to be qualified. As a generalization it is open to both misinterpretation and misapplication. Let no one say that we must cast all caution to the winds and heedlessly expose ourselves and our children to all kinds of dangers. Of course, we cannot avoid all danger; in the line of duty we are bound to encounter much of it; but we have no right to tempt God. Let no one advise us to close our Christian schools and dismiss both our teachers and our pupils to the secularized public schools. Let no one tell us we have right along been mistaken in opposing mixed marriages. Let no one inform us that it is wrong for us to establish organizations for specifically Christian social or political action. Let no one accuse us of narrow isolationism because we have kept ourselves aloof from the liberal brand of ecumenism.

Yet it cannot be denied that our influence is being restricted by an unhealthy isolationism. Far too often, let it be said again, we hide our light under a bushel instead of placing it high upon a candlestick. We seem not to realize fully that as the salt of the earth we can perform our functions of seasoning and preserving only through contact.

We must acquaint ourselves with the American ecclesiastical scene. Some of us cannot distinguish between the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. We must study prevalent theological trends. Not nearly all of us know how Barth's view of the Bible differs from Calvin's, and many of us take it for granted that all premillenarians are dispensationalists. We must humbly instruct the members of other evangelical churches and even more humbly learn from them. We must willingly co-operate with evangelicals in the distribution of Bibles, the maintenance of our religious liberties, and other activities which do not entail the weakening of our Reformed witness. Our ministers must shed the light of

the Word of God on the social problems of the day, and our societies should study those problems in that light. We urgently need such instruction as is offered by Gerrit Hoeksema's forthright articles in current issues of *The Banner* on "Communism." We must insist on social justice for all and actively oppose iniquity in high places, let the chips fall where they may. We must participate in social welfare work for the entire community. On important national issues, especially such as have moral and religious aspects, we must write to our congressmen. Many more of our men must seek political office. Having provided Christian schools for the children of the covenant, we have no right to leave the rest of young America at the mercy of a godless educational system. When we read in the newspapers and the magazines about juvenile delinquency, labor racketeering, bribery of government officials, and prostitution, we must, instead of thanking God that we are better than others, join hands with all men of good will to stamp out such iniquity. When lewdness or sacrilege is broadcast on radio or television, we must protest. We must call back the American people, in language that they can understand, to the God of their fathers. Actuated by a passion for souls, as well as a consuming love for God and His Christ, we must bring the gospel to the unsaved, whether they be near or afar off.

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If we are to be influential, we must present a united front. A house divided against itself cannot stand, neither will it make a favorable impression on the neighbors. "Behold, how pleasant and how good it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." It is there that the Lord has commanded His blessing (Ps. 133:1, 3). We are told that, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church, its members, "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God." It is said further that they had "favour with all the people." And significantly, "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2: 46, 47). A united church proved to be an influential church.

The Christian Reformed Church is united in its acceptance of the Bible as the very Word of God. Its membership is also held together by the Forms of Unity: the *Belgic Confession*, the

Heidelberg Catechism, and the *Canons of Dort.* Although the creeds are not infallible as is the Bible, no departure from their teachings — except in very minor details — is tolerated. We adhere to those teachings not merly *insofar as* they are Scriptural, but *because* they are. That is to say, the Christian Reformed Church is definitely and emphatically a confessional church. As such it presents a solid front and is in a position to make a strong impact. May we never become divided in our evaluation of the Bible, and may our confessions never become a dead letter to us. Those evils have overtaken many a church. May they never overtake ours.

Must we conclude that there is no room for differences of opinion among us? Certainly not. Our creeds do not exhaust the Bible, and it can hardly be expected that all of us would agree on the exegesis of every verse of Scripture. And, because the creeds are not infallible, any church member has the right to ask for their revision. In short, being a Protestant church, the Christian Reformed Church recognizes the right of each believer to the private interpretation of Scripture. However, it is not true, as is sometimes said, that a member of the Christian Reformed Church may believe and teach anything he pleases, provided his beliefs and teachings do not contradict the Forms of Unity. Because those confessions do not exhaust the Bible, it is altogether conceivable that a church member may fly in the face of a plain teaching of Scripture which does not happen to be mentioned in them. That, of course, would be intolerable. Here let me say that to my mind Scripture leaves no room for the notion that, so far as his physical make-up is concerned, man may have evolved from the lower animals. It must also be remembered that, when a church member has requested the correction of what he considers to be a significant error in the confessions, and the church after careful deliberation has refused to accede, he must either submit or depart.

Not many churches today exercise judicial discipline, and very few are wont to discipline heretics. Such failure can only result in disunity. To the present day the Christian Reformed Church has been an exception to the rule. May it ever continue faithful in this regard, for the proper exercise of discipline is not only highly conducive to unity, but requisite for it.

It has been said that whatever doctrinal differences may be

found among us amount to no more than differences of emphasis. Assuming that to be true, let us beware of jumping to the conclusion that our differences are all of them of minor import. Theological unbalance has frequently proved the precursor of heresy. In fact, the history of Christian doctrine tells us that heresy has usually originated in that way. Theological balance, on the other hand, has time and again served as a safeguard against error. And that means that it is no less important that our preaching and teaching be based on the *whole* of the Bible than that they be based on the Bible *alone*.

Unity and peace are, as it were, the two sides of one coin. God sets great store by peace within His church. He commands us: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." And the inspired Psalmist pronounced the benediction: "Peace be within thy walls. . . . For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee" (Ps. 122:6-8). Every one of Paul's epistles to the churches of his day began with the salutation: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." The same apostle admonished the believers at Ephesus "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Such is the duty of every true church of Christ.

There are a great many reasons why a church should strive for peace. To name a few, peace contributes to the spiritual welfare of its members and to the glory of its great Head. And, not to be forgotten, internal peace greatly strengthens the church's witness and thus promotes incalculably its influence on those without.

However, that holds only of true peace. Regrettable to record, in many churches a false peace reigns. It is peace at the expense of truth and holiness and is not worthy of its name. It is the peace of the cemetery. Scripture commands us to "love the truth and peace" (Zech. 8:19). The order is significant. Truth comes before peace. Peace presupposes truth. Truth is prerequisite to peace. Only peace that is based on truth is peace at all. Elsewhere Scripture tells us: "To be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). Sin in its very nature is disturbing. It drives apart what belongs together. Invariably it sponsors division. But holiness authors peace. A sin-ridden church may present the semblance of peace; true peace is found only in that church the members of which walk with God.

No duty is presented more frequently or more forcefully by the Word of God to the members of Christ's church than that they love one another. Only when they keep that command can they expect to be blessed of God and to be made a blessing.

In the shadow of the cross Jesus said to His followers: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." And He added: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13: 34, 35). Brotherly love is the theme of the epistles of the apostle of love. And the apostle Paul had in mind primarily that love when he declared love to be the greatest of Christian graces, greater even than faith and hope (I Cor. 13:13).

Undeniably, we of the Christian Reformed Church have need of being reminded of the command to love one another. May I here make a few specific suggestions? It is evident that we find it extremely difficult to carry on in love discussion of matters on which we differ. That ought not to be. Gossip, evil-speaking, backbiting, and slander should not be heard among us. Let us firmly resolve to desist once and for all from the cruel pastime of caricaturing each other and from the vicious practice of setting up a straw man, knocking him down, tearing him to shreds, and withal leaving the impression that he who was demolished is some flesh-and-blood member of our church. And let us beware of lightly accusing of lovelessness those of our number who vigorously oppose error and earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Such judging is itself loveless in the extreme. I have at close range witnessed such procedure. When J. Gresham Machen strove to stem the tide of liberalism in another denomination, he was charged with disturbing the peace of that church, but in reality his accusers were disturbing the peace by their denial of the faith. The history of Ahab and Elijah repeated itself. Once more those who were troubling Israel by their sins accused one of God's prophets of that very evil for no other reason than that he rebuked them for their sins (I Kings 18:17, 18). They maligned him as a difficult individual, devoid of love; but in so doing they themselves sinned heinously against the law of love. More valiant Christian soldier than Machen I never met. More gracious Christian gentleman than Machen I never knew. To the tune of I Corinthians 13 his

enemies vilified that faithful witness. May God keep the Christian Reformed Church from sanctimoniously stoning its prophets!

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If the Christian Reformed Church expects to influence its surroundings, it must, as men are wont to say in this age of commercialism, have something to *sell.* In Christian terminology, it must have something to *give.* And that which it offers must be of great value, of greater value than what is offered by other churches.

If we can make no such offer, then at best we are duplicating other denominations. The duplication of churches being both useless and sinful, we had better in that case allow our church to be absorbed by another. The very reason for our denominational existence has then vanished — if indeed there ever was a valid reason. God be thanked, such is not the case! The Christian Reformed Church possesses an eminently worthwhile distinctiveness.

Distinctiveness is not always a virtue. The distinctiveness of a church is not in every instance an asset. It may prove to be a liability. When a church insists on the exclusive use of the hundred and fifty Psalms of Scripture for song in public worship, on the exclusion of all instrumental music from public worship, on one mode of baptism, excluding every other, on the use of only the so-called common cup in the celebration of holy communion, on the impropriety of participation by its members in the common worship of any other church whatsoever, on the banishment of every bit of symbolism from its place of worship, on distinctive dress for its clergy and possibly for all its members — one may, and also should, respect the sincerity of such a church, but one can hardly laud it for its sanctified good sense. Such distinctiveness goes beyond the requirements of the Word of God. It must be judged to be narrow. It savors of sectarianism. And it cannot be denied that such a church is needlessly restricting its influence to the outside. It is endangering its hold even on its own children. While we may be thankful that, some of our critics to the contrary notwithstanding, the distinctiveness of the Christian Reformed Church does not fall into that category, a warning against that type of distinctiveness is hardly superfluous. May our church be kept from degenerating into a mere sect.

Ours is a small church as churches go. It has a pronouncedly Dutch background. And it is not widely known. In consequence, some of our members have acquired what may be described as a denominational inferiority complex. They feel apologetic about being Christian Reformed. When asked about their ecclesiastical affiliation, they say only that they are Reformed or, preferably, Presbyterian. They would have the Christian Reformed church fall in line, to a very large extent, with other denominations. For instance, they would dispense with catechismal preaching, or at least camouflage it; they ridicule the institution of stated visits by the elders and the minister on the families constituting a congregation as indeed a "visitation"; they may become "oncers"; they do not hesitate to have their membership transferred to another denomination if that serves their convenience, and especially if it will add to their prestige in the community; perhaps they favor open communion. Such an attitude betrays a lack of appreciation of the distinctiveness of the Christian Reformed Church and can only be a serious detriment to its influence.

As was said, the Christian Reformed Church has an eminently worthwhile distinctiveness. Of what does it consist? The answer is: its being Reformed, its Calvinism. And what does that mean?

The Reformed faith is not something small or narrow. It most assuredly embraces the five points of Calvinism and the doctrine of the covenant of grace, but it also comprehends the entire body of Christian theology. The doctrines of the inspiration of Scripture, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, regeneration, justification by faith only, the one holy and universal church, the resurrection of the body, the eternal separation of men in heaven and hell — all these, and a great many besides, are constituent elements of the Reformed faith.

Men often speak — and legitimately so — of different Christian traditions. The Christian Reformed Church, far from being an eccentric aggregation, stands in the great and glorious tradition of Warfield and Hodge, Bavinck and Kuyper, the Westminster Assembly and the Synod of Dort, Calvin, Augustine, and, to cap the climax, Paul. Calvinism rests squarely on the teaching of that inspired apostle. Augustine rediscovered Paul. So did

Calvin. So did the Dort and Westminster divines. And so did that galaxy of brilliant Calvinists which adorned the theological heavens of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth. If an anachronism may be permitted, Paul was a Calvinist, a more thoroughgoing Calvinist than John Calvin.

Let no one think that Calvinism is one of several interpretations of Christianity, of equal value, perhaps, with other interpretations, but no more valid than they. To quote Warfield: "Calvinism is not a specific variety of theism, religion, evangelicalism, set over against other specific varieties, which along with it constitute these several genera, and which possess equal rights of existence with it and make similar claims to perfection, each after its own kind. It differs from them not as one species differs from other species; but as a perfectly developed representative differs from an imperfectly developed representative of the same species. There are not many kinds of theism, religion, evangelicalism, among which men are at liberty to choose to suit at will their individual taste or meet their special need, all of which may be presumed to serve each its own specific uses equally worthily. . . . Calvinism conceives of itself as simply the more pure theism, religion, evangelicalism, superseding as such the less pure" (Article "Calvinism" in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge,* 1908). Although no human interpretation of Christianity can lay claim to perfection, Calvinism is Christianity in its purest, most consistent, and most nearly perfect expression.

The essence of Calvinism lies in its being God-centered. It is God-centered in its theology, its ethics, its preaching, its evangelism, its pastoral counseling, its view of all of life and the whole of the world — in short, all along the line. Its motto is that all things are of God, through God, and unto God (Rom. 11:36). And since Christ is Himself God and the highest revelation of God, Christ-centeredness is synonymous with God-centeredness.

God-centered is also the Reformed teaching of salvation. It is the unqualified, unadulterated, unalloyed Scriptural teaching of salvation by grace. And salvation by grace is salvation by God, the triune God. God the Father before the foundation of the world chose in Christ all who are to be saved. God the Son, by paying the penalty of their sins to the uttermost farthing in

His accursed death on the cross and by obeying the law of God to the point of perfection, merited salvation for them so fully that precisely nothing remains for them to merit. God the Holy Spirit bestows upon them in regeneration the gift of faith, by which they lay hold on Christ and all His benefits and thus come into actual possession of salvation. Now there awaits them "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (I Pet. 1:4). Salvation from its first beginning to its ultimate end is of the sovereign and unmerited love of God. That doctrine, which constitutes the very heart of the Christian gospel, lies at the very core of the Reformed faith. And to that gospel every true believer in his inmost being, his heart of hearts, subscribes. It is implicit in faith in Christ, which in its very essence is, to quote once more the *Westminster Shorter Catechism,* "a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon Him *alone* for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel" (Answer 86).

Such is the precious heritage of the Christian Reformed Church. Shall we detract from it? But that would be to detract from *Christianity.* An old and wise saying warns: *Obsta principiis;* that is to say, "Withstand beginnings." Let us stedfastly refuse to detract even a little from our Reformed heritage. Shall we and our children not much rather enter more fully than ever before upon its enjoyment? What we need is not to become a little less Reformed, but much more so.

To impart that heritage to others is at once our most solemn duty and our most glorious privilege. Shall we not impart it untarnished and undiminished to men of every kindred and tongue and people and nation?